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FOR HIS PEOPLE

BEING THE TRUE STORY OF SOGORO'S
SACRIFICE ENTITLED IN THE ORIGINAL
JAPANESE VERSION THE CHERRY
BLOSSOM AT A SPRING MORN

RETOLD BY

VISCOUNT HAYASHI

ILLUSTRATED BY R. KADO



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LAR

TERS

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■ REFACE

THE daily life of the toiling peasantry of Japan is still sharply differentiated from that of their compatriots dwelling in the great cities. Unswerving fidelity to established custom, respect for constituted authority, and blind obedience to those simple precepts that served to guide their forefathers through many generations, have ever been the leading principles on which Japanese farmers have shaped their course and based their loftiest aspirations.

But there were in the past, as the annals of my country amply testify, dark days when the "oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumacious" the patient rice-growers into a semblance of vigorous remonstrance, and

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the malcontents were not always unsuccessful in their efforts to make their voices heard.

Instances of downright tyranny, however, were somewhat rare, and to ~~fact~~ should be ascribed, perhaps, in a great measure, that peculiar fascination which narratives framed upon deeds of heroic self-sacrifice on the part of those who, making light of personal danger, dared to war against injustice, do unquestionably, for the majority of my countrymen, still possess.

The truth is that the rule of the feudal chiefs of Japan in days of yore was not quite so despotic as by some people it is thought to have been. It was not a little tempered by the disposition—only exhibited, however, under circumstances of the strongest possible provocation—to appeal directly to the Shogun, who dwelt in semi-regal state in the city of Yedo. Such an appeal could ~~not be~~ regarded as other than a most desperate expedient, for

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the penalty for indulging in so grave an infraction of the law was death.

But for the very reason that the punishment which it carried with it was so well comprehended by high and low, this final endeavour to attract the Shogun's attention was seldom fruitless. It implied the existence of so pressing a case for inquiry that the victims of oppression had been able to procure at least one champion of their claims who was ready to lay down his life in their cause.

About forty miles directly to the eastward of the Japanese capital, which formerly was known as Yedo, but has in recent years been re-named Tokio, the strikingly beautiful Lake Inba, fifty square miles in area, spreads its broad and silvery expanse amidst well-timbered and eminently picturesque ranges of low hills. The slopes are clothed luxuriantly to the water's edge with almost every variety of tree and shrub to be found growing wild in a temperate zone, and its surroundings harmonize in their

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entirety with that air of tranquil repose which is engendered by Inba's complete freedom, so far, from the disturbing effects of modern manufacturing enterprise. There are as yet no smoking mill-chimneys to mar the landscape, and the mirror-like surface of the lake reflects the clear blue of the skies.

Two miles from the eastern margin of the lake stands the hamlet of Kodzu, a place which can boast of no particular attractions beyond those that appertain to its historical associations. Yet these will suffice to endear it for all time to admirers of true and loyal service, by whomsoever rendered.

Close to the edge of a wheat-field, on the outskirts of the village, are to be seen three unpretentious tombstones, the inscriptions on their faces setting forth in simple terms the date and place of death of those who were, two hundred and fifty years ago, buried in that peaceful spot. The rough-hewn monoliths mark the graves of Kiuchi Sogoro, his wife,

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and their four children, who all were condemned to death for an offence committed by the head of the family, trivial enough, perhaps, in the estimation of most people nowadays, but heinous to a degree in Japan at the time of which I write. For Sogoro had constituted himself the mouthpiece of the people of the vicinity, and had appealed, on their behalf and his own, directly to the Shogun regarding the misrule—as he and his fellow-peasants deemed it—of the feudal lord of the province, the Baron Hotta. Sogoro's aim had been to rescue the inhabitants of the three hundred and eighty-nine villages included in the fief from the miseries entailed by the extortions of the feudal chieftain's rapacious steward and his subordinates. When he undertook the task of appealing to the highest authority, Sogoro was, of course, fully prepared for the consequences of his act. Though he well knew that it involved crucifixion in his own case, he preserved an unruffled calmness

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until he discovered that the ruler had decreed sentence of death likewise upon an innocent wife and her children, and who shared the fate of the head of their family. For Sogoro personally death had absolutely no terrors. As a true patriot he held that he had simply performed his duty, and he had realized from the outset that there would be no diminution of the penalty. But in his last moments he vowed that his spirit should haunt those who were responsible for the unmerited punishment of those near and dear to him. The promise was fulfilled in a way that to the reader will vividly recall the tragedy of Macbeth and the apparition of the murdered Banquo.

Sogoro's heroic self-sacrifice did not pass unappreciated by those whom he aimed to benefit. The grateful villagers buried the remains of the six victims of the severe penal laws of the age on the spot where the executions took place, and themselves erected the monuments that are still so carefully and

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reverentially tended. Only recently, as if to emphasize the strong hold which deeds of patriotism ever have upon the sympathies of Japanese people, a temple dedicated to Sogoro has been erected in the vicinity. And though the events narrated took place long since, laurel wreaths and fresh flowers are still placed to-day on the graves by residents and travellers, in token of the enduring fame that was won by those who sleep beneath.

Some thirty years ago a celebrated actor-dramatist of Japan wrote a play to which he gave the title of "The Cherry-blossoms of a Spring Morn," based upon those pages of his country's history that are herein alluded to, and of which the present volume constitutes an English, and here and there amplified, translation. The actor-dramatist to whom I refer himself personified Sogoro in the version given on the stage at that time.

Necessarily the dramatist had to take some liberties with the original text of Sogoro's tragic

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history, owing to the exigencies of theatrical representation in Japan, and the details were in part fictitious. But in the main the accuracy of the story as given in the chapters which follow may be vouched for, scarcely any deviation having been made from the substantial facts recorded in official publications of the period.

I have been led to relate the story afresh, in the hope that it may prove to be acceptable to readers in the Occident, and should it serve no other purpose than to throw light upon the natural disposition, in some degree, of my fellow-countrymen, I shall have ample reason to be satisfied with the result of my efforts.

In the preparation of the work for the press I have been aided by Mr. J. Morris, who was for many years a resident in Japan, and by whose knowledge of the country and acquaintance with the language I have been materially assisted.

February, 1903.

HAYASHI.

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CHAPTER I

THE CASTLE OF SAKURA

THE strongholds which the feudal chiefs of mediæval Japan built for themselves are conspicuous objects to-day in many parts of the empire, for they were constructed upon sound scientific principles by the most skilful native architects of the period, and of material that was not only capable of offering a stout resistance to the assaults of enemies wielding such engines of warfare as the age could boast of, but which was, in addition, well-nigh proof against the ravages of time. The castle of Sakura, in Shimosa province, was no exception to the rule, and with but the loss of its central

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tower, due to a fire that occurred many years ago, it still exists, practically, unimpaired, bearing eloquent testimony to the substantiality of the work done by the artisans of the middle ages. It stands in the midst of a fertile country, just on the edge of a precipitous and almost isolated eminence that juts out into a narrow glen, through which flows a tiny stream that shortly afterwards loses itself in the deep waters of Lake Inba. The castle walls, loopholed at intervals of a few feet, run over and around the brow of the hill, and command completely every approach on three sides, whilst on the fourth, that which faces the town of Sakura, there is a fosse, fully one hundred yards in width, and forty feet deep. On the north, east, and west a moat brimful of water, and sixty yards wide, farther secured the defenders from attack. Altogether, in the days when men fought with bows and arrows, the garrison of Sakura had some reason to regard themselves as fairly safe from assault, save by a

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more than usually well-equipped and resolute foe.

The land contained within the castle's massive walls was of considerable area, comprising, indeed, some thousands of acres, the "hon-maru," or true centre, being the innermost of three almost concentric rings. Each of these annular spaces was capable of defence, and within the "hon-maru" stood a three-storied tower in which the garrison might, if hard pressed, have made a last stand. This tower, as in all castles of Japan, was termed the "ten-shu," and in the very early days when Jesuit missionaries were numerous in that country, these towers, as is, indeed, to be inferred from the name just given, were the foci of Christian worship, and bore aloft on their highest pinnacles the symbol of the cross. After the expulsion of the Jesuits in conformity with the edict of the Shogun Iyemitsu in 1627, the crosses were removed, and only the name survives to point to the uses to which the

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"ten-shu" was put as late as the third decade of the seventeenth century. In the inner ring next to the "hon-maru" were to be found the ordinary residence of the baron, flanked by the quarters of his chief officials and the leading members of the clan, together with the armoury and other store-houses. Much of the space in this section was at Sakura devoted to parade-grounds. In the outer portion of the enclosure were the barracks of the common soldiery, and the dwelling-places of the minor officials of the baronial establishment, next to the main boundary walls and moats. At times the retainers were so numerous as to require accommodation outside the walls.

At the period in which the events that have now to be related actually took place, Hotta Masanobu, with the title of Kozukénoké, was lord of the castle of Sakura. The family was not of great antiquity, but the house of Hotta was one that had exercised much influence in the Empire. The father of Hotta

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Masanobu, indeed, had been raised a step in rank and appointed a member of the Shogun's cabinet, in recognition of his meritorious services to the State, and his admirable management of his lands. But Masanobu had given no indication of a disposition to walk in his father's footsteps. On the contrary, whilst the rule of the first baron had been merciful as well as just, and his people had entertained for him an almost filial regard, his successor remained at the capital the whole of his time, and left the affairs of the fief in the hands of a chief steward, whose sympathies were very far from being in harmony with those of his late master, or with the needs of the people. The first Baron Hotta had maintained his ascendancy in the council at Yedo by the wisdom and foresight that he had ever brought to bear in administrative concerns, but Masanobu held office at the capital principally by reason of the prestige that still clung to his father's honoured name. Nevertheless, the duties that

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he was called upon to perform were undoubtedly of a sufficiently onerous character to necessitate those prolonged absences which his people had so much to deplore. And, profiting by the opportunities thus afforded him, the steward, whose name was Sugiyama Danjo, gradually but surely usurped his master's power, and grossly abused the trust reposed in him by subordinating everything to his own insatiable greed. He oppressed the baron's tenantry with an intolerable burden of taxation, the while he amassed a fortune for himself. He filled the gaols with peasants whose only offence was their downright inability to comply with the appalling exactions of the tax-gatherers. He remorselessly confiscated the property of innumerable wealthy families on the most flimsy of pretexts, accusing the members thereof of participation in plots, or in actual crimes, against the State, of which they were entirely innocent.

One glorious day in autumn, when the baron

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was, as usual, absent at the capital, Sugiyama sat surrounded by his sycophantic coadjutors in all his wicked schemes, in a spacious hall that opened into the palace gardens, which at that season of the year were miracles of loveliness. The rich foliage of clustering trees swayed gently to the afternoon breeze, in glistening tints of scarlet, amber, and green, like a cunningly woven curtain—to adopt the phraseology of the ancient chronicle—of imperial brocade, hanging in a sky of cloudless blue, its glories reflected in the pellucid waters of the artificial lakes beneath, wherein disported themselves, in shoals, purple and golden carp. Nowhere was there aught to be seen save that which was best calculated to gladden the eye and soothe the mind, for art in its highest form had been brought to the assistance of nature, without prejudice to the pristine beauties of tree, flower, and shrub.

But the conversation of the men who had gathered in that charming place was far from

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being attuned to the ennobling influences of the hour and scene. It was mercenary in the extreme.

"My dear Mr. Steward," began Fukushima Heima, "my original proposition to levy licence dues on the abacus, on the balance, on the poles used in carrying goods, and on mats for the floors, has already been productive of truly encouraging results. I pride myself on being competent to discharge all the duties of an imperial finance minister. I hope, sir, that you will not overlook my services, which have ever been exclusively devoted to the advancement of your interests."

"Pardon me, Mr. Heima," struck in Tanaka Soyemon; "your endeavours have doubtless been not entirely devoid of merit, but our people are beginning to be restive under their burdens of taxation; and it is a lamentable fact that, in spite of all the efforts that have been made, all the arrests and imprisonments, all the confiscations of already

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Impoverished properties, the sums paid in to the treasury do not equal even one-half of the normal levy—the arrears are in excess of the collection. There has, indeed, been much ado about nothing, and were you to become finance minister as you suggest, you would make a pretty hash of things in the imperial treasury. Pray, Mr. Chief Steward, consider that I was instrumental in obtaining for you, by one stroke of the pen, a huge sum that was more than a hundred times the amount of the taxes upon knick-knacks that Mr. Heima brags so much about. I trust, sir, that you will recall to mind my services before any others.”

“Ah, no doubt,” hotly retorted Heima, “you allude to the forgery, perjury, and what-not with which you entrapped the rich merchant, Masuya Gohei, and by means of your abominable snares contrived the confiscation of his immense property; but let me tell you, such a detestable act, had it been that of a private individual, would have ensured

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the severance of his head from the rest of his wretched carcass. My scheme, on the other hand, is a perfectly legal one, and calculated to add to the revenues in a steady flow ; it is one worthy of a statesman."

"What !" cried Tanaka. "How dare you call a samurai a forger !" — catching at the handle of his sword.

"Ha, ha !" roared the other. "A precious fine example of a samurai you are, indeed !" And seizing his keen-bladed weapon, he shouted to his adversary, "Come on ! come on !"

"Be quiet, silly fellows !" bawled Sugiyama. "Whatever method may be employed to increase the revenue is deserving of commendation, and, as a matter of fact, you have both of you been more than sufficiently rewarded already for your services. The truth is that you call upon me so often to remember them that my faculty of memory is becoming dulled by perpetual worry. You will, I feel sure, endeavour henceforth to accomplish something

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of a nature calculated to stimulate my recollection of your usefulness. But hark! what noise is that I hear without?"

At that moment in rushed a gatekeeper, his countenance ashy pale, crying out in terrified accents, "Gentlemen, gentlemen! riots, riots! There are crowds of peasants forcing their way up the courtyard. They are determined to be heard, they say, and they look fierce and resolute. I feel sure they will resort to violence. Something terrible is about to happen. Pray look to yourselves. I'm off! I'm off!"

"How ridiculous!" said Sugiyama. "Go and see, gentlemen, what is the matter. Probably it is nothing more than one of the stock grievances of the ignorant populace, which, in spite of untold benefits that we confer upon them, seem never to be satisfied. Try to soothe them, if they will listen, and if they will not, employ threats of condign punishment. Go!"

The courtyard proved to be as crowded

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with demonstrators as the excited gatekeeper had indicated. There was much hubbub taking place ; but the quick eye of Toriyama Kageyu, one of the chief steward's cronies, speedily assured him that the rioters bore no arms of any kind. So he confronted the mob boldly, and shouted—

“Well, my fine fellows, what is it that you seek here ? You are aware that this is the private residence of our master, the Baron Hotta. If there is anything that you would like to have conveyed to him, you should go to Government House. In other words, if you wish to petition you should do so through the proper channel. Do not incriminate yourselves by intruding upon precincts to which you have no right of access.”

“We know that well ; we are fully aware of it !” cried out many of the peasants together. “We have been more than once to the local government office, but the officials there turn to us only deaf ears, and we have

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petitioned them in writing with no better result, for our papers were simply cast back into our faces. We stand here now for justice. We are resolved that, come what may, we will be heard by the real representative of our lord the baron, and by none other. Last year the tax on our land was raised twenty per cent. over and above the official assessment. Dues have been levied upon almost everything that we need for our daily use. We groan under imposts the sum total of which it passes our ability to pay. We once were told that large expenditure would be necessary in carrying out drainage works in connection with Lake Inba, and we did all we could to meet the demand, denying ourselves almost the very necessities of life in order so to do, for were we not led to believe that by means of these drainage operations large tracts of land would be reclaimed from the lake, and made available for rice-growing, and we should be well repaid? Has ever anything been done towards

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the fulfilment of this promise? No! The drainage works have not even been commenced."

Toriyama stood listening to this impassioned harangue in dignified silence, whilst the spokesman, emboldened by this attitude, went on to declare—

"But let the past be past. This year we hoped that a good crop might be ours to recoup us in some measure for our losses of last season, and that, according to promise, the land-tax would be reduced. What a disappointment was in store for us! Instead of a reduction we have an increase in that tax. Other imposts, too, are heavier than they ever were before. Already some hundreds of families have been forced to betake themselves to other provinces, leaving their fields untilled, and their homesteads desolate. We who remain here shall soon be compelled to follow their example, unless the pressure on our shoulders be relaxed. Therefore we

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petition that the land-tax may be lowered to the former rate, and that licence dues be abolished. We pray—nay, we insist, that these concessions be made.”

“Silence, you ignorant and insolent fellows!” thundered Takaishi Bungo. “The taxes and dues are all of them levied at the express command of our lord, the Baron Hotta, who alone is master of these lands. If you resist his command, be it of whatever nature it may, you are guilty of treason. Imprisonment, perhaps torture, will be your due. Go your way, good people, before harm comes to you, and pay what you owe in a proper manner, without any more fuss.”

“Torture, Master Bungo!” cried the peasants with one voice. “What torture can be greater than death by slow starvation? If it be your will, imprison us, torture us; it is all one to us. We—we *insist* that our demands shall be acceded to.”

Then it was that Sugiyama Danjo, who,

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though unseen, had listened to all that had passed, came forward and, assuming his most magisterial manner, said—

“Friends and fellow-subjects of our lord the baron, give a little more consideration, I beg of you, to what you say. You well know that it is the lord of the land who protects you in your holdings, who punishes wrong-doers and resists aggression from without, in order that you may enjoy in peace the fruit of your labours. It is your duty to pay in the form of taxes for these inestimable services. The lord is for the people, and the people for their lord. You know what boons you derive from the State, and intelligent men like yourselves must surely appreciate what is meant by the term ‘gratitude.’ If you realize the force of my argument, return quietly and peaceably to your homes, and do what all honest fellows ought to do. It is not in our power, in any case, to act contrary to his lordship’s direct commands.”

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“Fie! fie! Humbug!” shouted his hearers in a breath. “‘Protection,’ ‘State boons,’ ‘gratitude’ indeed! You cannot deceive us this time with mere empty high-sounding words. His lordship the father of the present baron, though he never imposed a tax that was one farthing above the official assessment, nevertheless contrived to bestow upon us good schools for our children’s education, to build temples for us to worship in, to construct roads and keep them in repair, erect bridges, succour orphans, and comfort the lonely old folk whose age and infirmities rendered them incapable of providing for themselves. All these things were done for us in the time of the first baron; but since the present lord took possession of his inheritance, we truly see and hear of nought but excessive indulgence in every species of luxury and extravagance. You appear to be bent upon depriving us of every atom of our belongings to pay for these pleasures. Out upon you!

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We will hold no further parley with persons so unfeeling. You are sticks and stones, without sympathy, without humanity. We will go to Yedo and petition our lord the baron himself. You will be sorry when it is too late. Come, let us set out at once ! Let us be off immediately ! ”

“Poor misguided creatures ! ” said Sugiyama, laughingly, after they had left. “They seem determined to go to Yedo ; but they little dream that I have taken the precaution to place men in his lordship’s *entourage* who are in my confidence. Besides, it is my daughter who has the control of the baron’s household in Yedo. There is no likelihood whatever of their being able to obtain a hearing there. As a consequence, the baron himself will presently become the object of their hatred and fury. We shall in the end be material gainers at his lordship’s expense. More than that, if the people become turbulent, and the fact of their being so is taken official cognisance

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of at Yedo by the Shogun's Government, there is a very fair chance of the fief being taken away from the Hotta family altogether. Who can say, gentlemen, what might not happen after that? I might be able to execute one or two little manœuvres myself at the court of the Shogun. Should the course of events tend to bring about these happy results, I promise you, Master Heima, the lucrative post of controller of accounts; you, Tanaka, shall have the direction of the police, and the rest of you shall enjoy substantial rewards according to merit. With these grand possibilities in view, I have already secured possession of certain priceless articles—to wit, the Imperial charter for the fief, and that famous heirloom of the Hotta family, the sword that bears the title of 'Me-rio-maru.'* Until the consummation of our hopes shall be attained, however, we

* *Me-rio* = feminine dragon. *Maru* = a suffix to the names of swords or ships; sometimes it signifies a male child.

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need, my friends, to be exceedingly wary and circumspect.” •

With these words the arch-conspirator left his admirers enraptured over the prospect revealed to them of their ultimate advancement. •

CHAPTER II

ON MASAKADO-YAMA

MASAKADO hill is one of many that border Lake Inba. It takes its name from a noted warrior who rebelled against his sovereign as long ago as A.D. 938, and proclaimed himself Emperor. He set up his court in Sarushima, a place not far from Sakura, and arrogated to himself all the privileges of an imperial prince of the Taira house. Tradition, the only guide to these somewhat dark pages of Japanese history, affirms that Masakado-yama was one of this usurper's fortified posts, and though no actual traces of military works are visible to-day, there is a mound on the summit of the hill which the people of the adjacent villages firmly believe to be that wherein lies buried

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the wife of Masakado, a dame who bore the pretty name of Kikyo, after the plant (*Platycodon grandiflorum*). Visitors are gravely assured that, though in early autumn the kikyo blooms luxuriantly on Masakado-yama, it avoids the mound which covers the lady Kikyo's tomb. Not a single specimen has ever been gathered from that sacred spot, and to the rustics the reason of this is altogether plain. How could the kikyo, itself so perfect a flower, intrude where perfection, as typified by Masakado's devoted wife, already reigns? The villagers tell the story, too, of a wicked attempt to violate the sanctity of the tomb, years ago, an attempt that was frustrated only by the diggers, the moment that in their excavations they reached the lid of what seemed to be an ancient stone coffin, being seized with a sudden chill that smote them to the heart. In their terror they hurriedly replaced the earth and piled it up, mound fashion, to the original height. Any one who commits sacrilegious actions in

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Japan, whether it be by inflicting injury in any form upon the trees of the sacred groves, or in the profanation of religious objects, is sure to meet, it is believed, with just punishment of the form described. The diggers in the case of the tomb on Masakado-yama, therefore, stopped short of rifling the coffin, and we are still indebted to tradition alone for such information as we possess concerning her who in this beautiful place was laid to eternal rest.

On the day that the troubles in Sakura culminated in overt disobedience to the instructions which had been given to its headmen, an immense gathering of Baron Hotta's tenantry took place at Masakado-yama, comprising people of both sexes and of all ages. They all bore arms of some kind or other, from scythes and pikes to axes and threshing-flails, the never-failing bamboo, sharpened at one end, having in many instances been requisitioned in default of a more lethal weapon.

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The vast assembly had made the hill its rendezvous in a desperate endeavour to give expression to the indignation felt by the multitude at the indifference shown by the chief steward, Sugiyama, to their grievances. Avowedly they were prepared to set out thence, at their leader's signal, on a march to the capital, but, as usual with rioters of this class, much disorder and tumult prevailed among the crowd. Rokurobei, who was the head-man of the village of Takizawa, and the promoter of this mass meeting, stood on the trunk of a fallen tree and harangued the throng until his face was the colour of a peony with his exertions.

“Keep yourselves quiet, fellow-villagers,” he roared, “for if you create so much uproar no arrangements can be made. Pray group yourselves with your neighbours according to the places from which you come, and tie some distinguishing marks to the tops of your queues to indicate the villages to which you

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respectively belong. It is necessary that the utmost care should be taken at times like the present if you would prevent rascals and impostors from mixing with you and frustrating your plans by premature disclosure of them."

"All right, all right," sang out many in the crowd.

"There is something more," continued Rokurobei; "the younger men must not shout out or take action of any sort before their seniors do so. We shall, in all likelihood, meet with officials as we go, who will do their utmost to thwart our progress. But, let it be fully understood, we shall not allow ourselves to be cajoled or checked, we shall take no heed of remonstrances, and we shall not recede one step until we have secured everything that we want."

"Of course," "Quite true," "Certainly not," answered his listeners.

"Farther than this," the speaker went on

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to say, "all of you who are over sixty or below fifteen years of age, and all you women and girls, must not think of accompanying us, but must go from this place straight to your homes."

"Very good," "We quite agree," were the responses that reached him from all sides.

"The distance to Yedo is not more than thirty miles," added Rokurobei, "and there will be much for us to do after we arrive there. It may be a matter of several days' stay at the capital, in any case. Are you provided with the wherewithal to appease your hunger?"

"Oh yes. We have abundance of baked sweet potatoes, rice cakes, and boiled barley, enough for many days' consumption."

"Very well. Now let me once more make sure that you all comprehend thoroughly what it is that you are about to do, for the step that we intend to take can only be regarded as a

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desperate one. If at Yedo they give in to our demands, all well and good ; but if not, we shall have to kill those officers whom we have had just cause so long to hate, and then of course we shall be punished as disturbers of the peace, for we cannot withstand the force that will be sent against us. That is our final resolution—is it not so ? ”

“ It is ! it is ! ” shouted his hearers, with one accord, in reply. “ We have all drunk a farewell cup of water with the members of our households, on taking leave of them. We have cut ourselves adrift from family ties, and are ready for any enterprise, come what may. There are no cowards in our ranks. Lead on ! lead on ! ”

“ Bravo ! ” answered Rokurobei. “ With such a resolve there is no fear of failure. But I do not observe that Sogoro, the head-man of Kodzu village, is present amongst us. What is the reason ? Has he been stricken down with sudden illness that he is

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not here? Or has he all at once become cautious?"

"Ay," responded one of the throng; "he is ever cautious and wise, but he never failed yet in his devotion to a righteous cause. Recently he has met with many misfortunes, and does not often stir out of his house to take part in public affairs."

"That may be," said another, "but if he be not bound to come forth on such an occasion as this, when, indeed, should he appear?"

"Ah!" sneeringly remarked one who was a little jealous of Sogoro's ascendancy; "he may be very wise and courageous in a time of peace, and yet may prove a poltroon when danger looms ahead."

"Impossible! No, no!" shouted scores of men together.

"But it may well be that his affection for his family is too great to permit him to risk his life, lest they should suffer," urged another dissident.

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"Shame, shame!" yelled the crowd, at this unworthy suggestion. "Look, look!" cried one; "is not that Sogoro toiling up the hill?"

"Sogoro, Sogoro!" was instantly on every lip.

A few seconds later he stood beside them. Saluting gravely those principal villagers who gathered around him, he civilly observed—

"Good day, my worthy sirs. You are taking upon yourselves much trouble and anxiety for the common weal."

"Do not allude to it, I pray," responded Rokurobei, "as any trouble. We are, no doubt, at the present time, and have been since last evening, occupied with very momentous matters. Almost every one who dwells in Kodzu has joined this assembly, and it is impossible that you have not heard already of what is in our minds. What induces you, then, at a crisis in our affairs, to affect such nonchalance as you now display? Do you

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intend to side with our oppressors ? Are you afraid to venture up to Yedo, or have you some deterrent counsel to offer us at the eleventh hour ? ”

“ Answer him ! ” roared the multitude ;
“ answer him ! ”

Calmly and dispassionately Sogoro launched his reply.

“ I understand quite well what is your intention, and I recognize fully what has led up to it. But ponder well your course and our requirements. We seek, by our present tactics, to obtain relief from a burden of twenty per cent. additional taxation upon land, and, further, from the licence dues now payable upon the implements used in agriculture. We are assured by the officials of the province that these taxes and dues are imposed in direct accord with the will of the Baron Hotta, but we are by no means satisfied that this is the fact. It may even be, we think, that the officials fleece us in order to gratify their

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own luxurious tastes, and merely seek in this way to throw the responsibility for their extortions upon his lordship. Is not this so?"

"Yes, yes! You are altogether correct. And it is on this account that we are going to Yedo to see him and have our wrongs righted."

"That is exactly where the difficulty lies," said Sogoro.

"We don't see it. How do you make that out?" asked Rokurobei and the other head-men with him.

"In this way," retorted Sogoro. "When we see his lordship, if he comprehends that we have been imposed upon, and sets things right, all will be well. But if it should turn out that, after all, it really was by his orders the extra taxes and dues were levied, it will be time enough then to have recourse to scythes, flails, bamboo spears, and other offensive weapons. The first thing to do is to ascertain the real

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wishes of his lordship, and in order to do so we must not commence with threats and riotous behaviour. Such a course of action is far too hasty, and very unwise. Should we be complained of to the Shogun as being in arms, it is evident that his Government would be obliged to send the gens d'armes against us, and our arrests would surely follow. We should thus be deprived of all chance of seeing his lordship, and should be accused and punished as disturbers of the peace. After all the risks that our course of action may entail, this would be a sad ending to the enterprise, for our cause would not be benefited in the slightest degree. On the contrary, all would be lost, and I urge upon you that these points demand the most mature consideration before we proceed any farther."

"Yes, we understand what you say," answered some of his hearers. "What would you advise us, then, to do?"

"I fear I have not much to suggest beyond

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what will have occurred to most of you already. One thing, however, may be said, and it is that the deputation ought to consist of only a few persons instead of a great many. It is true that we all are ready to sacrifice our lives for the cause, and that we all must die some time or other—sooner or later—but it is equally true that we each of us have but one life, and that it is folly to throw it away uselessly. It would indeed be a calamity if a large number of lives were lost without there being any occasion for the sacrifice. I recommend, therefore, that the steps that may be needful in order to learn our lord's will in regard to these taxation matters should be left to the consideration of the village head-men who are here present. For the remainder of you, the wisest thing will be to return to your homes peaceably and await the head-men's decision. You surely will not wish to leave your wives and children without their natural protectors, to mourn over a hasty and pur-

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poseless self-sacrifice. Life is of no more than a feather's weight in the balance when it comes to a question of yielding it up for a righteous object. But, on the other hand, it should not be given hastily, or without definite and assured motive, for vain repentance is usually the outcome of hasty acts, be their nature what it may."

"True, true!" assented many in the crowd.
"Sogoro is wise!"

"And then consider, I pray you," he continued, "that our object is not to seek revenge for past wrongs, but to obtain redress in the present and to secure an improved condition of affairs for the future. Therefore, my fellow-villagers, if you will consent to be guided by me, you will entrust the management of things entirely to your head-men, and await in your homes the good news that they may, before long, be able to bring back to you."

Sogoro's temperate utterances made visible

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impression on his auditors. His arguments carried conviction to the minds of all who had listened intelligently to his lucid explanation of the situation. The clamour had ceased from the moment that he began to speak, out of general and respectful admiration for his sterling common sense.

"I agree most heartily with all you say, Sogoro!" exclaimed Rokurobei. "Let our fellow-villagers quietly disperse to their homes, and let only the head-men remain. But it cannot be for long that we shall be able to postpone the payment of the objectionable taxes, hard pressed as we are by those in power. What do you recommend? How is payment to be evaded? Do we not want advice on this point also, my friends?" he cried, turning for a moment to the crowd behind him.

"Yes, yes! we do!" was the response. "We have bidden our families farewell; we have shared a last cup of water with

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them ; we cannot go back to them empty-handed. What has Sogoro, 'wise Sogoro, to suggest ? ”

For an instant Sogoro seemed to be revolving in his mind some subtle scheme. Then he spoke.

“You need not look to me for advice merely, because whatever concerns you likewise concerns me, and I bear my share in what may follow. We seven senior head-men will proceed to Yedo at once, and find out whether or not this fresh imposition of taxes is made with the cognizance of his lordship, or is merely another instance of oppression on the part of the chief steward. If we find that it is in reality by the baron's desire that the demands are made, we will remonstrate with his lordship, at whatever cost to ourselves, and should he still persist in his purpose, I have in my mind a plan which we will put into execution. But as secrecy is the very essence of success, I must not divulge that plan to you now. Will you trust us ?

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Will you impose entire confidence in our discretion ? ”

“ We will ! we will ! ” shouted the throng in unison.

“ Good,” said Sogoro. “ Now, then, comrades, to our preparations for the journey ! ” and with his six companions he withdrew.

CHAPTER III

BARON HOTTA'S RESIDENCE IN YEDO

DOWN to the year 1868, when the ancient feudal system of Japan was finally abolished, there were over three hundred provincial magnates whose rule in their own territories was, subject to the will of the Shogun, all but absolute. They were obliged, however, to reside every alternate year at Yedo, where dwelt the Shogun, or commander-in-chief. Theoretically they owned allegiance to the Shogun as the visible representative of the Sovereign, but practically the shoguns of the Tokugawa family, who were the last hereditary holders of the office, arrogated to themselves Imperial powers of which they were only in a sense trustees. In the seventeenth century, when the events herein narrated took

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place, every one of these many provincial rulers, termed *dai-mios* (lit. grand families), owned three residences in Yedo, these being designated the Upper Mansion, the Middle Mansion, and the Lower Mansion. No wonder was it, therefore, that the ideas formed by outsiders regarding the area and population of the then mysterious "capital of the Tycoon" were on altogether a large scale. Nine hundred mansions for the use of territorial grandees who only spent in Yedo one-half of their time, to say nothing of the space devoted of necessity to the palace and grounds of the Shogun himself, implied dimensions extraordinarily large for that period, and warranted in some degree the assumption that the Japanese metropolis was the home of many millions of people.

The Upper Mansion was in every instance set apart as the ordinary dwelling-place of the nobleman and his immediate retainers and their families. It was situated in the outer circle of the Shogun's castle grounds, within the principal

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moat. The Middle Mansion so called, was really an emergency retreat, situated in some distant quarter of Yedo, and to be had recourse to only in the event of fire, or when the Upper Mansion might stand in need of prolonged repairs. The Lower Mansion was a suburban residence, usually to be found in one of the picturesque environs for which Yedo was always famous, and in which the owner sought relaxation and relief from the strain of his official duties, or from the burdensome formalities of an age in which the aristocracy of the nation was fettered by a singularly rigid conventionalism.

The mansions of some of the wealthier nobles were encompassed by ornamental gardens many acres in extent, the whole property constituting a perfectly independent establishment, protected by ditches of appreciable width and depth. On the edges of these ditches or moats stood the buildings occupied by the retainers and followers of the nobleman, with two or three gaps only, where stood massive gate-posts

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and gates guarded night and day by sentinels. Access to these retainers' barracks was only to be obtained from the inside of the square, there being nothing beyond barred windows or gratings to break the monotonous courses of solid stone and cement in those outer walls which bordered the moats. The palace, or Upper Mansion, stood in the centre of the enclosed space, and faced the main gateway. Within his own property each nobleman enjoyed, so to speak, extra-territorial rights, for only his will was law there, and the Shogun's *gens d'armes*, invested as they were with abundant authority elsewhere, dared not enter without express permission. The dwellers in this *imperium in imperio*, namely, the chieftain's household, including his henchmen and their families, formed in every case a complete colony, isolated from its neighbours, and exempt from other than its own rules and regulations.

Baron Hotta's principal residence in Yedo, at the time that his tenantry in Sakura were

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enduring the privations resultant from their heavy burden of taxation, was day after day made the headquarters of boisterous revelry and unstinted luxury. Banquets and entertainments of all kinds were continually in progress, giving employment to hosts of serving men and women, and entailing a very large expenditure. Yet, as is not infrequently the case under like conditions elsewhere, the duties of these domestics were performed in perfunctory and wholly inadequate fashion.

Several of the baron's menials had gathered in the main gateway for a morning gossip, when one of them, whom we shall designate Narisuké, complainingly said—

“Such employment as ours is apt to benumb the feet and rack the loins with fatigue.”

Arisuké, his immediate neighbour, promptly assented, and added—

“It is true that twice a year, in January and July, we are given some coarse garments with which to cover our nakedness, but for the

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remainder of the year we are left to look after ourselves, and to do the best we can on a paltry ration of rice."

Narisuké : " Yes, a mere quarter-*sho* " (about one gallon, dry measure), " which is barely sufficient to support life. And for that we are expected to render all sorts of service in return. We are at work from early morn—cleaning and scrubbing and sweeping ; and when those tasks are at an end for the time being, we are made to run errands or march in procession, hither and thither, as part of his lordship's retinue. Ah me ! on what an inauspicious day were we born ! "

" Quite so," chimed in another of the party. " But what a lucky individual, on the other hand, is my lord ! He must have performed truly countless good actions in his former state of existence to be so singularly fortunate in this. What with his troops of singers and dancers to amuse him from hour to hour, he really seems to do just as he pleases.

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Compared with the jolly existence our master leads, our wretched lives are only those of moles: we never can succeed in raising our heads above ground."

Narisuké: "By-the-by, your talking of moles reminds me of those peasants from our province who continue to pester us almost every day. They say that there is something about which they are anxious to petition his lordship."

Arisuké: "Yes; they persist in demanding admittance to the palace, in spite of the fact that it has been refused, and that they have been more than once turned away."

Narisuké: "Truly they are incorrigible. Let us retire within and snatch a brief rest whilst we may, for they are sure to be here again presently to worry us."

The domestics rightly divined that Sogoro would not relinquish his efforts, notwithstanding the several rebuffs that he had already endured. Firm and dauntless in his resolution to effect

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the purpose that he considered it to be his duty to achieve, he soon afterwards made his appearance, accompanied by the other villagers, at the baron's lodge-gates.

Chuzo, the head-man of Chiba, then a small place situated on the margin of Yedo Bay, was one of Sogoro's party of seven, and he was, on this particular morning, in altogether a doleful frame of mind.

"In the hope that our petition to be heard may some time reach the ears of his lordship," he despairingly said, "we attend here day after day and plead for admittance, but oh, how dense and impervious, though invisible, is the shield that bars our way! Neither arrow nor bullet may pierce it, and consequently our sufferings may never be made known to our lord."

"It is as you say, Chuzo," responded Saburobei, his associate. "Almost every day since our arrival have we visited this gateway, only to be as frequently ordered off. The

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subordinate officers have met us with insult upon insult—their heartlessness and downright rudeness exceed all limits. At this rate our lives will not last long. Nature will not bear up against it.”

“Very true! very true!” admitted his companions, disconsolately.

“What is this that I hear?” broke in Sogoro. “Do not be so easily discouraged, my good comrades. Have we not accomplished much already? Think of it! Were we not able to persuade our fellow-villagers to abandon their wild notions of committing lawless acts which could only result in disaster to themselves and our cause? Did we not in that way save them from incurring the death-penalty as disturbers of the Empire’s peace? And have we not cheerfully accepted the risk that would have been theirs, and shouldered the responsibility of obtaining, at whatever cost to ourselves, some remedy for their wrongs? When so much is at stake, we surely must not

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give up because we are five, or even ten times repulsed, but must persevere to the end."

Sogoro's more cheerful tone soon had its effect, and he went on to say—

"Are we not resolved to accomplish our mission in defiance of every obstacle that may lie in our path? Let us try once more to obtain the ear of his lordship, and if we fail again, I have another plan to suggest."

Advancing toward the guard-house in the lodge, Sogoro exclaimed—

"Sirs—you who are the gentlemen-customers of the gate—we are the head-men of the villages in his lordship's fief, and we have a petition to lay before him concerning a matter of the utmost importance. We beg for admittance to his presence, that we may make our humble requests known to him. It is true that we have applied before, and have been refused this privilege; but, in view of the gravity of the subject, we have deemed it our duty to attend here again to-day. We pray

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you, gentlemen, to be so good as to transmit our appeal to his lordship."

There were some minutes of anxious waiting for the deputation before a petty officer of the guard made his appearance, and then it was only to harangue them in the style to which they had grown accustomed.

"Head-men of the villages," he shouted, "my lord has heard of the obstinacy with which you seek to force upon him your most unreasonable demands. He is exceedingly wrathful about it, and declares that if you persist in this course of annoyance you shall all be arrested forthwith as agitators and malefactors. You will do well, therefore, to depart quietly and peaceably, for if you do not, your foolhardiness will bring evil not only to yourselves, but to your wives and children. Again I say, be sensible men, and cease your visits, for they can bring to you nothing but trouble."

"We quite understand what you say; but, sir, the very lives of the people dwelling in his

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lordship's province are dependent upon our gaining a favourable response to our petition. If you refuse to put forward our respectful appeal for an audience, we shall remain where we are, at the gate. You may kill us, if you wish to, but we shall not move one inch willingly."

The resolute, albeit perfectly respectful tone in which Sogoro gave utterance to this determination made the officer pause, and he was still at a loss how to comport himself in the emergency, when from behind him there came suddenly into view a grandly apparelled personage, evidently of some rank, who wore two richly ornamented swords in his girdle, and said with easy dignity, as he stepped forward—

"My name is Ikéura Kazuye. You have taken upon yourselves an overwhelming amount of trouble in thus journeying all the way to Yedo to present your petition. I understand that it has reference to the

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twenty per cent. increase in taxation and to the levying of licence dues. But ponder well, before you go farther, good people, what is the system of administration that is in general operation. Every branch and department has its own authorities to supervise its affairs, those matters, for example, relating to Yedo being in a different category to those of the provinces. It is thus quite out of the usual course to disturb his lordship's leisure with provincial concerns whilst there are plenty of officials stationed in the fief whose duty it is to busy themselves therewith. You should have sought redress through the proper channel."

"We are truly grateful, sir," replied Sogoro, "for the polite and considerate way in which it has pleased you to address us, but we have already brought our grievances to the notice of the provincial officers. Not once, but many times, have we done so, and they still remain blind and deaf to all that we can do.

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or say. The chief steward, moreover, to whom also we have appealed, has not one spark of sympathy for us—at least, if he has, he does not show it.”

“Proceed,” said Ikéura; “I am listening.”

“We thank you, sir. The position, as you perceive, is a desperate one, for unless relief be granted, the inhabitants, old and young, male and female, of four hundred villages in his lordship's fief are as surely condemned to die of slow starvation as it is certain that a new day will dawn to-morrow. So dismal has become the outlook for them that the other day they were found contemplating a most risky undertaking. They had taken up arms, of one kind and another, in evidence of their appeal against insupportable taxation, and, after bidding their families a last farewell, were bent upon making their way to Yedo to remonstrate with his lordship himself. They did not act thus, you may be sure, sir, without a consciousness of peril.”

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"I can well believe it," said Ikéura. "They knew that such conduct was in downright defiance of all law and order."

"Quite so, but they had been driven to despair. However, after some earnest expostulation from us, the head-men of the principal villages, the people were persuaded to abandon this extreme course, and we then took upon ourselves, as a party of seven, to bring our troubles to the notice of the baron himself, in the hope that he may be prompted by those humane and just sentiments that he is believed always to entertain towards his tenantry to grant us the favour we ask."

"Your expressions, so far, betoken good sense. What next?" said the gentleman before them.

"On arriving here, we find," continued Sogoro, "that his lordship spends his time in a way that makes it impossible for us to gain his ear directly, and there appears to



"We pray you to assist us, sir," added Sogoro's six associates. [The face page 52.

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be no one who will consent to hand up our petition to him. Thus there remains no course open to us but to forcibly present it ourselves at the principal gate, even if our lives should be forfeited for our audacity. Surely, if only to save appearances, our lord will then be induced to take some notice of our act, as public attention cannot but be attracted thereby. And thus our perseverance will meet with success at last, though it be at the cost of giving dire offence to his lordship. We are resolved to take the chances of punishment, in view of the necessities of our case. From the kindness you are showing to us, however, we indulge in the hope, sir, that you will condescend to put forward our request to his lordship, although others have refused."

"We pray you to assist us, sir," added Sogoro's six associates. "We perceive that you are a Samurai of noble principles. We urge the humble demands of all our people, and if

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you will aid us now, we shall all of us ever regard you as having saved our lives.”

Ikéura, whose truly generous nature was touched by this piteous request, paused for an instant, undecided as to what course he should pursue. But speedily there came the remembrance of that injunction which had been laid upon him not to listen to the peasants' harangues, and he sadly, but nevertheless firmly, answered them—

“Evil is always evil, and good is nothing but good, though, owing to the depravity of human nature, the two appear sometimes to be intermingled, and evil-doers seem to prosper. But rest assured, my good friends, that in the judgment of Heaven there is never any such confusion of motives. You will do well to withdraw to-day, and deliberate further, bearing in mind what I say.”

“No, sir ; no !” cried the men in chorus, all save Sogoro. “We will not withdraw ! we will not go away !”

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But Sogoro, more cautious, made signals to them—with his eyes alone—of warning, and very reluctantly they followed him, as he made his bow to Ikéura. Together they then retraced their steps to the inn at which they had established their headquarters during their temporary sojourn in Yedo.

CHAPTER IV

AT THE INN

IN days of yore travelling in Japan was very different to what it is now. One had either to go afoot, or to ride in a palanquin, though in some stages pack-horses were provided, bearing wooden saddles, on which it was possible to perch one's self high up, after the fashion of a bale of merchandise. Jinrikishas—which, by the way, are now generally styled kurumas—did not make their appearance until 1872. Twenty-five miles, or at the utmost thirty, constituted a fair day's journey. Obstacles to progress, even at this modest rate of speed, were numerous and exasperating. Often they took the form of disastrous inundations, caused by

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swollen rivers after heavy rains. At other times the checks were ascribable to the caprices of frontier guards, men stationed at the provincial boundaries to check espionage. The barriers so set up were neither few nor far between, and, taking it altogether, a long journey overland was fraught with so many difficulties and drawbacks that most people were content to live and die in the places where they were born. Travellers were as a rule retainers of the feudal chiefs, bound on errands of some sort or other for their liege lords, or merchants who were engaged in business transactions with others in distant parts of the Empire, or persons performing pilgrimages to sacred shrines in various more or less remote regions. Those who journeyed purely on pleasure bent were comparatively few in number, for there was only the minimum of enjoyment to be extracted from an enforced stay of some days' duration, for example, at perhaps a most uncomfortable

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roadside inn, whilst waiting for the waters of an adjacent ferry to subside. There is an old proverb in Japanese which runs, "Let the beloved sons set out on their travels." The importance of travel as an aid to education, and as a means whereby children who are in danger of being spoiled by over-indulgence at home may learn some of the practical lessons of life, can scarcely be exaggerated. A true regard for their children's welfare was therefore certain to prompt those who read this ancient maxim aright, to send their beloved sons away on expeditions that were calculated to afford them at least a prospect of occasionally "roughing it," and in this sense the proverb was distinctly apposite when quoted with reference to journeys undertaken in Japan at a period anterior to the introduction of railways.

Yedo, in those days, was without hotels in the modern sense of the word, and merchants who visited the metropolis were accustomed

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to lodge with their commercial correspondents resident there. In the same way, the few tourists or students who went to the capital usually had friends there to receive them ; and the retainers of the provincial lords, of course, found shelter at their respective chieftains' "yashikis," as the mansions situated within the moats were usually termed. Only pilgrims passing through Yedo, pedlars on their rounds, or rustics seeing the sights, were likely to have need of such accommodation as the inns of that era, which might preferably have been designated cheap lodging-houses, could afford. These humble hostelries were, for the most part, to be found in close proximity to the several centres of trade, and their guests were people whose vocations in life led them thitherward. This description applied particularly to the house in Ko-ami, *i.e.* "Little Net" Street, wherein Sogoro and his friends had taken up their quarters for the time being. It had the advantage of being situated close to the yashiki

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of Baron Hotta, and it was to Ko-ami Street that the seven men returned after their interview with the Samurai Ikéura at their lord's gateway.

An inn of the class indicated was not likely to possess a large staff of domestics. The one in question owned but two : a maid-servant named Onabé, and a man named Sansuké.

"Has it not been growing colder these last few days, Master Sansuké?" asked the maid.

"It has," assented her companion. "The winds blow furiously in this city of Yedo, and cause the winter to be doubly as cold here as in my native province, which is, after all, a far better place than this."

"Wind or no wind," retorted Onabé, who was Yedo-bred, and therefore fully satisfied that nothing could be superior to her birthplace, "there are no theatres in the provinces, nowhere to go for recreation. In

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January I shall have a holiday, and I mean to spend it enjoyably in a Yedo theatre."

"Ah! we have no regular theatres, it is true, but there is always a marionette show. Moreover, I do not like theatres."

"A marionette show is a ridiculous, childish affair!" angrily replied the girl; and the dispute between the pair concerning the relative merits of the two forms of entertainment waxed warm. It threatened, indeed, to be endless, when a stranger suddenly thrust in his head at the doorway, and said—

"Pardon me, I am a priest just arrived from Sakura. My name is Kozen. If Sogoro is staying in your house, please to tell him that I am here, and that I wish particularly to see him."

But Sogoro had instantly recognized the priest's sonorous voice, and at once came forward, with his comrades, to welcome the visitor.

"How is this, my dear uncle?" asked

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Sogoro. "You have ventured upon a journey to Yedo in spite of the fatigue that, for one of your years, it must have entailed. It is astonishing! But, first of all, let us relieve you of your sandals and leggings."

So saying, he, with the others, was promptly occupied in untying the priest's footgear, and, after washing his feet in the warm water that Onabé quickly fetched from the kitchen in a footbath, they escorted the old fellow to an interior apartment, and saw him comfortably established on a pile of cushions.

"Don't mind my being fatigued, I beg of you," he said. "You have already overwhelmed me with attention." And turning to the maid-servant, who waited to receive his commands, he merrily remarked, "An old man, like a sack, must be kept well filled, or a collapse is inevitable. I beseech you, therefore, to see if there be anything ready with which I may appease my hunger."

"Yes, reverend sir," responded Onabé,

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"your meal is being prepared, and will be served directly. Allow me to take your hat, stick, and bag to your own apartment within."

The moment that the girl had left the guests to themselves, Kozen turned to his neighbour Sogoro, and, in an anxious whisper, inquired—

"What prospect is there of gaining his lordship's ear? I am all impatience to learn how you have fared in Yedo. Do not imagine that I have other than absolute confidence in the wisdom and righteousness of the course you are adopting, for I know that you are doing everything you possibly can to deserve success. It was only because I found the suspense unendurable at home, and wanted so much to see you, that I resolved to set out. I am here without even an attendant, having quitted Sakura quite privately."

"My dear uncle," responded Sogoro, "I am sure we all are sorry to have been the cause of your anxiety, but our regret on that score

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is being lessened by our having you with us, looking, as you do, the picture of health, too. I hope all our friends at home are well also. There has never been a day that we have not spoken of you amongst ourselves, but we have not dared to write, lest our communications should be intercepted and turned to our discomfiture, in some way or other, by the corrupt officials of our province. That is the difficulty in which we are placed."

"Ah, Sogoro," said the priest, almost with asperity, "do not suppose that I am here to listen to merely commonplace greetings. We well knew that when you left home it was with the determination neither to write nor to return until such time as you might be able to announce that you had succeeded in your object. Thus, when day after day passed without any tidings reaching us, we became tortured by doubt and perplexity. I, for one, began to fear that you might be disheartened by long waiting. At last my anxiety to obtain

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news of you became intolerable. Now tell me all that has befallen you since you reached the capital."

Thus importuned, Sogoro briefly sketched their adventures with the gatekeepers and others, not omitting mention of the civilities extended to them by Ikéura.

"He was almost courteous to us," added Hanjuro, another of the seven head-men. "Many different officials have at various times spoken to us, but not one of them comported himself as did Ikéura, though we scarcely comprehended the meaning of some of his cryptic utterances. And it was because we seemed at last to have some chance of being heard by a generous-hearted man that we could not understand why you, Sogoro, obliged us to withdraw at the critical moment."

"You had some excuse, perhaps," said Sogoro, "for feeling a little puzzled; but the fact is that I saw it was useless to persevere any farther on the lines that we originally laid

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down for ourselves. I felt that we should never gain our object in that way, and that it would be necessary to pursue altogether different tactics. Having arrived at this decision, I begged of you all to retire with me to our inn."

"And what may be this new method of attack?" asked one of the other men.

"Well," answered Sogoro, "when we quitted Masakado-yama it was with the resolve to do or die, was it not?"

His associates bowed assent. "That is why we persist in our endeavour to see Baron Hotta himself," said one.

"But whilst life may willingly be relinquished in order to promote others' welfare, no one wishes to lose it in vain. To die without achieving one's object is to die the death of a dog. That is not what we hope for."

"Assuredly not," answered Sogoro's hearers. "But what can we do?"

"I will tell you. Let us appeal directly to the Shogun."

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"What?" shouted the others, aghast at such audacity.

"Hush!" continued Sogoro. "You need not be alarmed at the suggestion. Suppose our petition had been received by Lord Hotta, the mere fact of our having ignored the provincial authorities by appealing to his lordship direct would probably have been seized upon by our enemies, the cruel officials at Sakura, to denounce us as having incurred the death penalty. I scarcely think we should have come out of it with our heads upon our shoulders. And we can fare no worse if we appeal to the paramount authority in the Empire, the Shogun himself. Instead of giving the minor Sakura officials an opportunity of wreaking their vengeance upon us, we prefer to take the risk of giving offence in high places, for we shall at least draw attention to our petition in a way that may be productive of good to those whom we leave behind. Thus we shall not perish ignobly."

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"Excellent!" said Chuzo of Chiba, the oldest of those present. "Well said, Sogoro. The course you suggest is certainly the best for us now to adopt. I feel as though a brighter day had dawned for us already, after a long night of sorrow. A heavy weight has been lifted from my shoulders. You know the old maxim—'The day on which a good resolution is formed is a lucky day for action.' Let us act upon Sogoro's suggestion forthwith."

"Softly, my brethren; softly. You must not be precipitate," smilingly urged Sogoro. "To approach the Shogun is a task of even greater difficulty than to secure a hearing from the lord of a fief, and we know what a stupendous undertaking that is."

"True, true," assented Hanjuro.

"But if you are at one with me in the matter, there will be an unusually fine opportunity on the morning of the twentieth day of the present month. The Shogun will

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then go in state to worship at the shrine of his ancestors in the temple at Uyeno. No better occasion for our purpose could perhaps be imagined. We have only to wait, let us say, at some point on the route, and abruptly hand in our written petition to his Highness as he passes by in his sedan-chair. In theory it is all extremely easy, but we must for an instant glance at the practical side. When the Shogun travels abroad, all the side streets opening into the main thoroughfare, as well as that thoroughfare itself, are closed to public traffic. The householders are compelled to close their doors and windows along the route which his *cortège* takes, and there must not even be any perceptible smoke issuing from the kitchens. His Highness's palanquin is surrounded by the high officers of State and of his retinue, and in all there are hundreds of guards, in the van, on both flanks, and in the rear, whose ranks it is impossible to

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break through. Even to catch a glimpse of his Highness as he passes is quite an achievement. How do you imagine, then, that we seven, going in company, are ever likely to penetrate this moving fence of samurai?"

"We follow your argument," said his hearers. "Proceed."

"Then," said Sogoro, "my idea is that one person only should seek to deliver the petition, and that the other six of us should go home at once to Sakura, but secretly, nevertheless, in order not to attract the attention of the provincial officials."

"And what chance is there," asked Chuzo, "of this one person, singlehanded, evading the guards?"

"I will explain," said Sogoro. "At the entrance to the temple grounds at Uyeno the roadway passes over three little bridges placed abreast across a rivulet. He who may be selected for the honour of presenting the document will conceal himself beneath the

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central bridge of these three, which is that over which the Shogun must pass."

"Good!" said the listeners. "We begin to understand how it may be done."

Sogoro went on to say, "The width of the bridge being very limited, it is not possible for his Highness's guards to march alongside his palanquin at this point. At the utmost there can be but two or three within reach. Watching his opportunity, the chosen person will jump upon the bridge and hold out the petition at the end of a cleft bamboo, as near to the Shogun's hand as possible, crying out at the same moment, 'A petition, my lord; a petition!' If matters proceed satisfactorily up to that stage, I cannot believe that the Shogun will not deign to receive it. And if he accepts it he will read it, for that is his invariable practice, and he will unquestionably order inquiries to be made at Sakura. The next thing that we have to settle is, who among us shall be entrusted

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with the duty indicated? I should explain that, though the Shogun, if appealed to, is sure to institute inquiry, and will insist upon our wrongs being redressed, lest discontent in a single province should spread to the Empire at large, it is equally certain that he will hand over the audacious petitioner, whoever he may be, to the lord of the fief, to be dealt with according to the laws of the province. That means that the death punishment will beyond doubt be inflicted, as prescribed by statute; but, inasmuch as we have all of us become peculiarly obnoxious to the officials at Sakura, it is exceedingly likely that crucifixion will be the form of execution chosen for whomsoever may be selected to deliver our petition. Therefore I would urge upon him who may offer to remain in Yedo for the purpose of performing this duty, to regard himself as one condemned to die, and as already standing on the brink of the grave."

The solemnity of Sogoro's manner deeply

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impressed his companions, and for an instant profound silence fell upon the little group. Each of his hearers was momentarily communing with his own soul, and picturing to himself a scene in which, and perhaps at no very distant date, he might be the central figure. But it goes without saying that there was no faltering, for to men of their stamp an end so honourable as that foreshadowed, far from possessing for them any terrors, was something to be sought and striven for by all.

Chuzo of Chiba was the first to speak.

"Ah!" he said, with rapture, "I comprehend entirely our position, and revel in the prospect before me; for to me, of course, as the eldest, is presented this glorious opportunity to win renown. I promise you, comrades, that I will carry out the task thoroughly. Sogoro, you will return home, together with the rest of our party, and devote your great abilities to the service of our four hundred villages and the

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promotion of their inhabitants' welfare. My mind is fully made up."

"Not so fast, friend Chuzo," broke in Hanjuro. "This affair demands something other than the sagacity of age ; it needs the agility of youth. I have, in that respect, more right to claim the privilege of acting as the bearer of the petition than you have. Let me, therefore, take precedence on this occasion, rude as it may seem."

"Not so," remonstrated Chuzo. "Age has nothing to do with the question ; besides, you are not so much my junior as all that. I have another consideration to urge, too—one which I need not make public at this stage—and I beg that you will leave the task entirely to me."

Here the priest Kozen struck in, paying a deserved compliment to his friends' eagerness to face a very real danger.

"It is truly admirable," he said, "that you vie with one another, as you do, to acquire

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that which is not more a post of distinction than one of certain death to the occupant. Nevertheless, I will venture to ask you to entrust my nephew, Sogoro, with this most honourable duty. As you are all doubtless well aware, he is a native of Kiushiu, where his father, Takatsu, was hereditary head-man of a village under the lord Hosokawa. Unhappily for Sogoro, owing to some local troubles, Takatsu's possessions were confiscated by the lord of the province; and not long afterwards, on the death of his father, Sogoro, whose mother was my own sister, came to live with me in my temple. Gradually he made acquaintances among the neighbouring villagers, and one of the residents, by name Kiuchi Soyemon, became so convinced of my nephew's sterling worth that he ultimately adopted him. Sogoro thus was joined to the family of Kiuchi, and the union was further cemented by Soyemon bestowing his daughter upon the young man in

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marriage. I fear I am wearying you with this recital."

"Not at all; pray proceed," said his auditors.

"I thank you. In the course of time Kiuchi Soyemon died, and the villagers confirmed Sogoro in the office of head-man, a position that he has ever since held with credit to himself. He has never been wealthy, of course, but with the modest salary attached to his post, he has been able to live in comfort with his wife, and to bring up his children respectably. All these advantages he considers that he owes, firstly, to the good man, long since dead and gone, who adopted him, and, secondly, to the friendliness of his fellow-villagers, whom now it is his ambition, in some way or other, to serve. To sacrifice his life in their interests, will be only to partially pay the debt that he owes to Heaven, his ancestors, and his fellow-men, for the continued favours of which he has been the recipient. You,

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Sogoro, are ready to confirm my statements, are you not?"

"My ever-wise uncle, you have pleaded my cause most eloquently, and, I am sure, effectively. My comrades will not be able to refuse my request."

So assured did Sogoro feel of his comrades' acquiescence, that his thoughts there and then turned to his home and family, and the conviction being borne in upon him that, under an arbitrary provincial government, even the lives of his wife and children would not be entirely safe at the hands of the petty tyrants who then held office, tears rose to his eyes despite his endeavours to repress his emotion. The next moment he was himself again, and, addressing his comrades—who had guessed the origin of his passing weakness, and had betrayed their sympathy with him—in his usual cheery fashion, he said—

"Now that business is settled, you must please make ready to depart from Yedo, because

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I have several little matters that I must attend to. I will join you in the principal apartment later on."

"Very well," said one of his comrades. "We will follow your advice, and go home quietly, but our thoughts will remain with you. Join us as soon as you can, that we may drink a parting cup of wine together."

Left alone in his room, Sogoro then for the first time caught the sweet sounds of a guitar, played softly by some one in the adjoining house. A song followed, and in it the singer all unconsciously gave voice to sentiments which at that very moment were agitating the listener's breast. The words were—

"In buoyant youth the hills
* We roamed from day to day,
'Neath noon-tide's beam, 'mid fireflies' gleam,
Our hearts were ever gay.

"We met by lake at dawn,
And yet he vowed at eve,
Sad days have 'passed since we were last
Together, love, believe.

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"The years have flown, but still
It seems but yester-morn :
God give His peace, when life shall cease,
To her, from lover torn !"

"Ah !" soliloquized Sogoro, "that is the song of Yuki, in which she recalls to memory happier days, when she and her lover had no thoughts but for each other ! But my sorrow is for my wife and children. When I think of what they will endure after I am gone my grief is poignant indeed. When I left home the little ones asked me how soon I should return and what presents I would take back to them. In my absence I fear they ask of their mother the same things, and that continually. Her difficulty must be to find answers for these artless queries. It will be beyond measure terrible for her if she learns that I am to be executed on the crucifixion pillar. And what if the tyrants execute her also ? The bare thought of it is unendurable. I have yet time to write. I must

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bid her farewell, and send the letter by my friends, lest I should never have another opportunity."

Praying to Amida and to his patron saints for their intercession on behalf of his helpless ones, he implored aid from the Divine Power through those channels to which he had been taught to turn in his extremity, and he was still beseeching and writing by turns when his uncle Kozen, uneasy at his long absence, stole quietly into the room.

Sogoro, his emotion at times over-mastering him, still held the pen in his hand.

"What is it that you write?" asked the priest. "If your resolution were to desert you now, we should be for ever disgraced. If, owing to the thought of what may happen to your wife and family, you fail in your important undertaking at the critical moment, lasting dishonour will cling to yourself, and to the family name you bear. I pray you, Sogoro, cease to think of terrestrial concerns,

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and concentrate your energies upon the success of your patriotic mission. Be a man. Let me take charge of that letter. I will preserve it most carefully, and hand it to your widow when you are dead."

Kozen, inured as he had become to almost Spartan discipline, and severed by the rules of his order from every home tie, was for an instant, perhaps, unconscious that his measured phrases sounded harsh and cruel. But the heart within promptly rebelled against the utterances of the lips, and brave as were his words, his voice faltered towards the end, his withered hands shook as though palsied, and with scarcely a pause the aged priest himself succumbed to the sad reflections of the moment. But it was not for many seconds that uncle and nephew thus mingled their tears. Sogoro was the first to recover his self-control.

"Dear uncle, I am bitterly ashamed that I gave way to grief. It can benefit neither

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my cause nor my family. Rest assured, henceforth, I shall not again break down. My mind has all along been made up. I shall never waver."

At that moment his six companions, being ready to set out, came to say good-bye.

"Sogoro," said Chuzo, "we pray the gods to grant you a full reward. We wait for good news."

"Be easy; trust to me," was Sogoro's reply.

"Farewell, brave comrade; farewell for ever!" cried all.

"No, no," said Sogoro; "not for ever! Is it not well said that when a diver plunges deep there is more likelihood that he will float again? Give me a goblet. I will drink deep with you of *saké* to our success."

Taking in their hands the wine-cups which the servants had brought in, all drank together, as one trolled out some fragments of a well-known poem that was usually recited in those

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days during performances of the classical "No" dance in the palaces of Yedo :—

"Unswerving in course as the arrow, as it hurries towards
its goal,
So is that of the stout-hearted soldier, of honour and
virtue the soul ;
The arrow can only move forward—it knows not how to
turn back,
And the warrior's aim is ever the same—'Onward !'—
what'er he may lack.

"Intrigue and treachery vanish, when encountered by
patriot zeal ;
Careless of what may befall us, we strive for the nation's
weal :
We don our corselets and greaves, and we grasp our well-
strung bows ;
We advance side by side, whatever betide, to prevail o'er
our country's foes."

The song ended, and it was felt that
nought remained for the friends but to part.
Those who set their faces homewards were
sadder than he who remained at the post of
duty, and it was with full hearts that they

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saluted their leader, gravely bowing their adieux. Inwardly they were convinced, however they might pretend to hold the contrary opinion, that this was a last leave-taking. For a few moments Sogoro watched them, as they passed down Koami Street out of sight. Then he turned back to his solitary apartment.

CHAPTER V

ASAKUSA

THE seventeenth day of the month had arrived, and there intervened but three to the climax of Sogoro's undertaking. In order to reconnoitre the ground at the spot where he purposed to conceal himself on the morning of the Shogun's procession, and to plan in his own mind precisely the moment as well as the exact place from which he would spring out upon the bridge, he quitted his hotel early on the morrow of his comrades' return to Sakura and made his way alone to Uyeno.

There he minutely inspected the stage, as it were, for the fateful exploit to which he stood committed. Nought escaped his cool calculating observation, for he felt that only by seizing the

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right instant for the presentation of the petition would he be able to accomplish that vital part of his difficult enterprise. His plans matured by careful examination, he next turned his steps toward Asakusa, distant one mile to the eastward.

Asakusa is renowned almost the world over for its magnificent temple, dedicated to Kwan-on, the goddess of mercy. It stands in the midst of extensive grounds, entrance to which is obtained through an imposing double-roofed gateway, painted a deep red. The broad paved approach is lined on either side with stalls, gaily decorated, wherein are offered for sale goods of various kinds, including rosaries, memorial tablets, pictures, and a thousand things more or less directly connected with Buddhistic worship. Whilst Kwan-on's aid is always given, it is said, to those who visit her shrine with the object of imploring her favourable intercession, the temple is none the less, as regards its precincts, a place of recreation.

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Thousands resort thither for pleasure alone, though few omit to say their prayers when they are there.

How this temple came to be built makes rather interesting reading. During the reign of the Empress Suiko an officer of the imperial court was exiled to the then wild and barren plain of Asakusa, on account of some offence that merited severe punishment. When traversing the thronged streets and byways of this district nowadays, no little difficulty is found in picturing it as the tenantless, uncultivated region that it formerly was, but there is no doubt that it so existed in the seventh century, to which tradition assigns the date of this noble fane's inception. The exiled officer was accompanied by three of his servants, who were brothers, and supported their master by fishing the river Miyato, better known by its modern name of Sumida. It flows through the capital's northern and eastern suburbs into the Bay of Tokio.

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On the night of the eighteenth day of the third month of the year that corresponded to 638 A.D., the brothers were out in their boat on the Miyato, fishing, and after a cast of their net they drew it up empty save for a luminous object, less than two inches in length, which they perceived was entangled in the meshes. This proved to be a tiny carved figure, radiating a glory from its head, that they at once knew to be an image of Kwan-on. Feeling themselves to be thus the recipients of superhuman favour, the brothers set themselves to work to provide a temple for this material evidence of the goddess's readiness to come to the aid of mortals, and they housed the image as well as their limited means enabled them to do. From that time onward the fame of Kwan-on's miraculous power to cure the ills that flesh is heir to spread far and wide. In all parts of the Empire there are to-day to be found gorgeous temples and lofty pagodas erected in honour of this beneficent

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divinity, and on many a lofty hill-crest her statue, based upon the solid rock, figures boldly as a land-mark for pilgrims to some specially favoured and picturesque spot.

Asakusa temple is almost continuously thronged with worshippers, and numberless devotees, after performing their religious duties within, betake themselves to the spacious and well-kept pleasure gardens in the immediate vicinity. Not far away are to be found shows of nearly every kind, including menageries, exhibitions of jugglery, and acrobatic performances. Booths for the sale of knick-knacks abound, and at most seasons of the year they are very well patronized.

But on the cold wintry day that Sogoro found himself in the place, even Asakusa presented but few attractions to loungers. The precincts of the temple were altogether deserted by idlers and devotees alike. The heavy cloud-laden atmosphere, notwithstanding that it was not long past midday, gave the impression of

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approaching night. A cutting north wind whistled through the screens, made of split bamboo, which formed the only shelter to a humble shed, one of many thereabouts, in which tiny cups of tea were purveyed to passing guests. Sogoro sat down on one of the little rough benches that invited him, in unpretentious fashion, to take a rest.

"Will you kindly bring me some tea?" he asked of a smiling damsel who came forward to take his orders.

His request was instantly complied with, and "You are welcome, sir," was the maid's salutation, as she placed the tea-cup, on its neat little tray, at the visitor's side. "It has become very cold, sir," she added, as she moved forward a brazier, containing live charcoal, to a convenient position. At the same moment she let down the long drooping sleeves of her "kimono" which, whilst she had been engaged in her work, had been held up by a cord known as a "tasuki." Her act was to

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be construed as a mark of politeness to the guest, and implied her recognition of the fact that she was addressing a gentleman. She bowed low as Sogoro, in his fatherly way, said—

“Yes, I notice some snow-flakes are falling, and it is likely to be a bitter night. You are very young and pretty, my girl. You must find it a dreary task to sit here all day waiting for customers. The shed does not half protect you from the blast. May I ask if your parents are alive, and how old you are?”

The maid, blushing a little, answered, “I am in my eighteenth year, sir; I hope and trust that my parents are still alive, but I was given to the owner of this shed, to be adopted as his daughter, when I was but two years old, on the express condition that no further communications of any sort should pass between my real parents and my father by adoption.”

“Ah! then I fear you are not very

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fortunately situated in thus being brought up by your adoptive parents exclusively ! ”

“ You judge rightly, sir,” the girl said, her countenance at once betraying her sadness at the thought. “ My foster-mother is very severe with me, and is truly hard-hearted. It is my duty to wait here in this shed day after day, from morn till eve, and afterwards, when I go home I am set to weave and spin, no matter how tired I may be. For the slightest neglect on my part I am threatened with the prospect of being sent adrift on the world or of being cast into a life of ignominy. But it is rude of me thus to weary you with the tale of my misery.”

“ Not at all. Pray tell me all that afflicts you. I am old enough to be your grandfather.”

“ Thank you, kind sir,” the girl said ; “ I pray every day at the temple that Kwan-on Sama will grant me the boon of meeting my true parents once more, and it is this hope

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that the goddess of mercy will be gracious to me that buoys me up: still I pass many an hour of the night in sorrow. I beg of you to forgive me, sir," she added, as the tears came to her eyes.

Sogoro was truly sorry for the girl, and feelingly remarked, "Grief and suffering are indisputably the lot of the majority in this world. But for you, my pretty one, there are surely bright days, and many of them, in store. Dry your eyes, and cheer up. You have health, and youth, all on your side. Pray earnestly to the gods, and be brave of heart."

"I thank you, sir, for your generous sympathy. It is very stupid of me to have spoken of my private woes to a new patron of my humble shop. Please pardon my freedom. And also excuse me whilst I run to the well for more water to make fresh tea."

"Do not trouble; I will keep shop for you whilst you are away."

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The maid trudged away with her bucket, and Sogoro said, half aloud—

“‘The course of human life,’ as Iyeyasu, the great lawgiver, well said, ‘is as that of a man who travels to a far distant country bearing a heavy burden. He should never hurry, nor should he ever idle on the way.’ The saying applies well enough, in most instances, but I am oppressed by burdens that belong to others rather than to myself. Nevertheless, my days are numbered. How ephemeral existence seems !”

Whilst he was deep in meditation an aged crone, bent nearly double by age, approached the shed, leading by the hand a little child. Seeing Sogoro within, she whined out a request for aid. “Have pity, benevolent sir, on the old and the young, and bestow upon us a zeni” (a copper coin of the lowest value).

Aroused from his reverie, Sogoro said, as he handed her a trifling sum, “Poor woman, are you obliged to beg at your time of life ?

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And with a little child, too! Is it your grandchild?"

"Yes, sir. A thousand thanks for your kindness! We are six in family, and with all our efforts we can but just gather sufficient alms to keep us day by day from utter starvation. Our lives are as evanescent as the dewdrop on a blade of grass, or the flame of a candle that flickers in the breeze! We know not what suffering may await us on the morrow."

"Old woman," said Sogoro, "I too have cause to feel depressed to-day, and I have been roaming hither and thither in an effort to discover some brightness. But the story that I have heard from the young girl who has charge of this shed, and the grave reflections to which you have just given utterance, more than ever dispose me towards melancholy. I seem to be pursued by the spirit of gloom. However, let us proceed. The addition of another drop or two

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to my cup of sorrow will matter but little. Tell me your history. From your mode of speech, I infer that your fortunes were not always so low as they are at present ? ”

Emboldened by his mien, which was far from being as dejected as his utterances, the poor old creature dried her tears and falteringly said—

“That is quite true, sir, as I will explain to you. I am a native of Sakurā” (here Sogoro’s interest in her visibly increased), “and my husband was well known there, but owing to an overwhelming misfortune, we were reduced to a condition of abject poverty.”

“Are you really from Sakura ? My home is very near that place also. What, may I ask, was your husband’s name ? ”

“Masuya Gohei. He was a merchant there.”

“Masuya Gohei ! I am astounded. Is it possible that you are the widow of Masuya Gohei ? ” And Sogoro moved his seat nearer to her.

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It was now the old woman's turn to be surprised, by her listener's vehemence.

"From the way in which you are interested, sir, on hearing Gohei's name mentioned, I may hope, perhaps, that you knew him?"

"You are justified to some extent in thinking so."

"It may be, sir, that you are one of his kinsmen?"

"There, again," smilingly said Sogoro, "though you are not quite right, you are not far wrong. I am Kiuchi Sogoro, of Kodzu village."

"Indeed, sir! Then you are the adopted son of the late Mr. Soyemon?"

"Perfectly true. You were living in Sakura town, and I have always dwelt in the village, so that it is not altogether surprising that we have never met until to-day; but I frequently heard of your husband from my father-in-law. What can have been the cause

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of your terrible reverses? Surely, if I am not wholly mistaken, you had a son! What became of him?"

"I see you are unaware, sir," said the poor woman, sobbing bitterly the while, "that my husband was accused of a crime of which, notwithstanding that he was entirely innocent, he was adjudged by the prejudiced officers of the court to be guilty, and was sent to prison. He died in gaol, and everything that we possessed was confiscated, including house, furniture, and land. My son and his young wife and three children, as well as myself, were all cast adrift at the mercy of the world."

"What an outrage!" exclaimed Sogoro. "What inhuman cruelty! Pray where did you go in your distress?"

"We had a distant relative at the capital," was the reply; "and we all made our way, as best we could, to Yedo. We have been dependent ever since upon the scanty earnings

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of my son, who has had six, including himself, to support by his manual labour. Latterly, through overwork, he has broken down, and has fallen into a lingering disease. He is unable to toil any longer."

"Is it, then, by begging alone that you contrive to exist?"

"Not entirely, sir, because my daughter-in-law strives her utmost, by washing and sewing garments, to gain a partial livelihood for us; but her time is much occupied in nursing her sick husband and an infant, to say nothing of all the household drudgery that falls to her lot, so that she cannot do as much for our joint sustenance as she could wish."

"She is a brave woman," said Sogoro, "and your case is beyond measure grievous. But how is it that I find you asking alms in so unlikely a spot as this, and on such a day!"

"I come here, as my daughter-in-law

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imagines, sir, to beg the intercession of the Goddess of Mercy—as I never fail, indeed, to do—but I also endeavour, knowing how hard a struggle it is for us to keep body and soul together, to procure a little charitable assistance from visitors to the shrine. I cannot help in any other way, owing to my age and infirmities ; but it is a hard fate for one who was the wife of the once prosperous Masuya Gohei ! ” So saying, the unfortunate creature again fell into loud lamentation.

Sogoro, despite his own troubles, had the deepest commiseration for her, and tenderly said—

“It is deplorable that your son should be so weak, and I happen to have with me a luncheon-box containing broiled eels and rice, of which I intended to make my midday repast. Do take it, I beg of you, and insist upon your son’s making a meal of this most nourishing food.” Also, here is a little money, which you will give to your grand-children.

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I wish I could do more to help you, but I am away from my home, and am, moreover, far from being in affluent circumstances. Do not think ill of me that I do not help you further: I have the will, but not the means."

"My gratitude in abundance is yours, sir," she replied. And turning to the youngster who accompanied her, she said—"Look, my dear, this good gentleman has given us something nice for your father to eat to-day, and money for our food to-morrow; make your bow, and thank him."

The little one, with a respectful salutation, at once complied, saying—

"I thank you, kind gentleman, for my papa."

"You are a clever child!" said Sogoro. "And see, old lady, the dark clouds gather overhead. . You had better be going. Farewell! Take care of yourselves on your way home."

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"Farewell, sir," said the widow, as she took the child's hand and moved away. "Farewell, and may the gods grant you a long and prosperous life ! "

Sogoro smiled sadly. "She can never dream," he murmured, "how little of that life remains to me ! "

And then, looking after her as she hobbled off, he added—

"This is another instance of the mischief which that arch-villain, Sugiyama Dai-zen, has been permitted to accomplish. Surely the avenging hand of Heaven will descend upon him ere long ! We shall see what time brings forth : at least, those who live will see. To-day I am fated to learn much of the sorrows of others, yet they do but serve to remind me of what my own family's lot will be when I am gone."

The thought penetrated to his inmost soul. An overmastering impulse seized him to visit his home once more.

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"This is the seventeenth of the month," he said half aloud ; "there are still three days to that on which I must make the plunge. Kodzu is nearly forty miles away, but there is time for me to go and return ; time for me to take a last farewell of my beloved ones. Still, if it should leak out that, in spite of what I said last night to my companions and my uncle, I secretly returned home, I should in their eyes be eternally disgraced."

The upshot of his cogitations, nevertheless, was a determination to set out for Sakura there and then.

"The gods will surely not be indignant," he soliloquized, "because of a last indulgence of my natural feeling as husband and parent. Woe is me ! I cannot resist it, weak though it may be to yield."

And going back to the temple, he fell on his knees in front of the altar and fervently prayed that Kwan-on would aid him to make the journey to and fro without mishap, so that

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he might be in his place on the twentieth day of the month.

A few minutes later he struck the highway through the suburb of Honjo and hastened oward Lake Inba.

CHAPTER VI

AT THE HIRAKAWA FERRY

SNOW had fallen heavily and continuously throughout the afternoon, robing the adjacent heights and the groves of pine that skirted their slopes in mantles of silver-grey, a tint which vividly contrasted with the dark background of lowering wintry sky that lay beyond, as night fell upon the scene at Hirakawa ferry. Here Lake Inba, confined to a narrow channel between somewhat lofty hills, breaks the continuity of the high-road joining Kodzu with the capital. The surface of the lake was in places frozen, and a keen wind swept through the gorge which unites the waters of the noble river Toné to those of Inba. Glimmering lights were here and there to be seen in the

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paper windows of tiny cottages, telling the tale of incessant toil within on the part of the humble occupants, lest they should be unable to scrape together the wherewithal to meet the exacting demands of their oppressors.

Jimbei, the aged boatman, peeping out from the doorway of his wretched little hut, cast his glances in all directions in the hope of espying chance travellers on their way to the ferry, but no one was in sight. The wintry season and inclement weather made passengers by his boat unusually scarce, and Jimbei was for the moment tempted to bewail his hard fate. But as he again sought all the comfort to be derived from his glowing hearth, on which he had piled such fragments of firewood as he had been able to gather in the immediate vicinity, he solaced himself with the thought that his very poverty was in reality his best protector. There was no disputing the fact, at all events, that it secured him immunity from the visits of the tax-collector, whereas

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those who lived in the towns and villages were subject to perpetual extortion at the hands of ruthless officials. Nothing could be extracted from Jimbei beyond the fees which he annually was compelled to pay for a licence to ply for hire. In Sakura at that period there were few callings, however humble, on which taxes, in some shape or form, were not levied, and Jimbei, being of a philosophic turn, found no little comfort in the thought that, if his earnings were infinitesimal, he at least had not to part with an appreciable percentage of them to others. So, after pitching some more brushwood into the fireplace, he lay down contentedly at the edge of the crackling pile to snatch a little repose.

But the ferry, despite its solitude, was a link in the chain of communication, and, notwithstanding the severity of the weather and the lateness of the hour, there were still a few persons afoot, as Jimbei shortly afterwards discovered.

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First there came a Buddhist priest, clad in old and travel-stained linen garments of the pattern peculiar to his order, and wearing on his head a large circular hat of woven cane, who shouted for the ferryman as he trudged along.

But the priest desired that Jimbei would take him across free of toll, on the plea that, being a holy man engaged in a pilgrimage to the sacred shrine of the god Fudo in Nara, he should be held exempt.

"I am very sorry," declared the ferryman, "but I have to put by a fraction of the fares I collect at each turn of the boat towards licence dues. I am not rich enough, therefore, to be able to devote any of my earnings to charity."

"You are a sinful man," retorted the priest, "and I have half a mind to leave you in your wickedness to bear the full penalty. You should store up righteousness when you have the opportunity given you. However, in order

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to extenuate your offence in some degree, I will go inside and accept in charity the warmth of your fire."

So saying, the complacent "unsui" stepped within the ferryman's hut and sat himself down, prepared to make a stay, as it seemed, of some days' duration.

The "unsui," to give the fraternity a title conferred upon them by the countryfolk, belong to a peripatetic priesthood whose nomadic habits are clearly indicated by the employment of this term, for a literal rendering of "unsui" would be "cloud and water." Unstable as are these elements in nature, and absolutely without any fixed place of abode, the wandering priests are ready at all times to accommodate themselves to circumstances, and to make themselves "very much at home" wherever they may chance to be at the moment.

"You seem to have a happy disposition," said Jimbei. "If you can wait until some

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more travellers arrive, I can give you a passage over with them."

"Don't make yourself uneasy on my account, I beg of you," said his visitor. "I am very comfortable here."

Just as he uttered these words a stranger, evidently a pedlar, of very corpulent figure and rubicund countenance, looked in upon the pair. Upon the new-comer's back was tied an immense bundle of cotton stuffs, wrapped in oiled paper to protect them from the snow. The ends of the coarse blue sheet in which the goods were carried were tied in front across the pedlar's breast, and, seeing the priest cosily seated by the fire, he sat down likewise, unfastening his pack as he did so.

"Well, old man," he said, addressing the ferryman familiarly, "you are not in the least altered since I saw you last."

"I thank you for the compliment," replied Jimbei, "but I feel that my years are telling upon me."

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"No, no," the pedlar declared ; "you look far younger than your age."

The ferryman was but little disposed to discuss the point, for he promptly said—

"Gentlemen, the snow has ceased ; I suggest that you cross at once, before it comes on afresh."

A minute later he untied the punt from its post, and disappeared with his passengers into the darkness.

Hardly had he done so when light foot-falls, as of a person stealthily approaching the hut, became faintly audible, and a man named Kurosaki, who was valet to Baron Hotta's chief steward Sugiyama, emerged from the shadows.

Finding Jimbei's domicile untenanted, he took a whistle from his pocket and blew thereon a shrill summons that quickly was responded to by some one who had been hiding not far away. This happened to be Kiyemon, a spy in the same employ.

"What is your will ?" asked the latter.

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Kurosaki's answer was of the nature of a self-evident proposition :

"This ferry is to the high-road as is the throat to the human body : it forms the only passage from Yedo to the provinces."

"I know that quite well, without your taking the trouble to jog my memory," retorted Kiyemon. "I am posted here to keep watch over it for that very reason."

"Well, you need not be cross about it. Have you seen any of those seven turbulent peasants whom we wot of pass this way lately ?"

"Not yet. But you may be quite easy. I am keeping a sharp look-out for them," answered the spy.

"Very good. Then I will return and apprise my master of the fact."

And the valet ran off towards Sakura, as Kiyemon returned to his burrow close by.

The ferryman, on returning shortly afterwards, secured the boat, and was in the act

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of once more entering his hut, when a cloaked figure, with features concealed partly by an umbrella-shaped hat and partly by the deep collar of a "kappa" or Spanish-patterned cape made of some thick cotton stuff, accosted him, and in a hoarse whisper uttered his name—"Jimbei ! Jimbei !"

A glance at his disguised visitor was sufficient to convince Jimbei of the identity of this latest comer to the ferry. It was no other than Sogoro, who had tramped thither from Uyeno during the afternoon and evening, a distance of fully seven leagues.

At one time Jimbei and Sogoro's late father had been close neighbours. Jimbei had been a landowner on a small scale, but owing to a succession of bad crops he had run into debt, and his slender possessions had been seized and sold by the authorities. Even then his liabilities on account of taxes had remained undischarged, and as a consequence he had been in imminent danger of incarceration in

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the common gaol. But Sogoro's adopted ^{ive} father, Soyemon, in pity for his neighbour, whose misfortunes moved his kindly heart, had paid on Jimbei's behalf all the sums that were owing, and not only had Jimbei thus been set free from his pressing obligations, but, by the exercise of Soyemon's influence, he had been fortunate enough to obtain the post of ferryman at Hirakawa.

In gratitude for the kindness which Soyemon had then shown, Jimbei had never ceased to entertain feelings of profound regard and respect for all those who were of his benefactor's family. In this he was obeying merely those impulses which swayed the simple-hearted peasantry of the age, with whom a due appreciation of favours received was a common virtue.

Recognizing Sogoro, therefore, Jimbei at once said, in an undertone—

“You are the master of Kodzu. What brings you here at this hour of the night?”

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"Hush, my good fellow!" replied Sogoro. "I am returning homeward on secret business of the most urgent character. I am convinced that spies are on my track. Are you willing to smuggle me across the ferry without any fuss?"

"Trust me, sir," said Jimbei. "I am ready to do anything that I can for you."

"You make my mind easy," continued Sogoro. "I am confident of your unfailing loyalty, but at this most critical moment of my existence you will, I am sure, pardon me if I chanced to use an expression that might be construed as implying a doubt which I certainly did not entertain for an instant."

"Pray do not mention it. I have many things," said Jimbei, "to communicate to you privately. It will be safest to converse when we are afloat, well out from the bank. Step in quickly, and I will push off into mid-stream."

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So saying, Jimbei untied the rope which held his boat, and with Sogoro on board, seated on the thwart nearest the stern, sculled slowly towards the opposite shore.

CHAPTER VII

SOGORO'S HOME

USUALLY an outhouse of limited dimensions, standing directly in front of the main building, but separated from it by a spacious courtyard, and altogether devoid of any pretensions to architectural beauty, the gatekeeper's lodge was nevertheless an indispensable adjunct to the dwelling-house of a villager possessing even remote claims to distinction. Frequently it happened that the gateway had no gates, and that the gatekeeper himself was non-existent, whilst the fences that were supposed to mark the limits of the property were dilapidated and useless to prevent ingress or egress. It still was important to the dignity

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of the occupier that the lodge should exist, even though untenanted, and in most cases a portion of its floor-space was devoted to the storage of implements used by the owner's men in connection with agriculture. There was ordinarily but one room, and that measured eighteen feet in length and twelve feet in width, on either side of the main gate, and a thatched roof covered the whole, the wood-work of the structure being painted black, whilst the outer walls were whitewashed.

Sogoro's habitation formed no exception to the rule. As head-man of the village, he necessarily dwelt in a building suitable to his station in life, and it followed that that building possessed a gate-keeper's lodge.

Passing through it unannounced—for Sogoro could not afford to employ a regular watchman—a visitor might have been attracted, on a certain wintry evening, by the cheerful glow of a bright charcoal fire that was

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visible in the front room of the main residence beyond.

Over the fireplace hung a steaming kettle, suspended by thin iron rods from the ceiling, and on a tray at the side stood tiny teacups, and all the needful appliances for making tea at any moment in the Japanese fashion.

But the air of comfort and prosperity thus imparted to the well-kept apartment was by no means reflected in the countenance of the dame who sat surrounded by her children at the bright fireside. She was a handsome woman of but little over thirty years of age—no other, indeed, than Mistress Tsuta ("ivy"), the wife of the absent Sogoro.

Three months had elapsed since her husband quitted Sakura for Yedo, and she had been all that time without news of him.

She had been compelled to get rid of her domestics one by one upon some pretext or other, lest they should be corrupted by

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Sogoro's enemies and converted into spies, and the menial duties of the household had, as a consequence, wholly devolved upon herself.

As she sat and pondered, in the stillness of the evening, upon the difficulties of her position, she longed for the return of the good priest Kozen, her husband's uncle, who, the day before, had gone to the capital in quest of news. The hour was growing late, and as he failed to make his appearance the dame's worst fears, that he might have been overtaken by a snowstorm, were painfully uppermost. But an explanation of his absence was perhaps to be found, she thought, in his desire to avoid recognition by the many watchers posted at points along the high-roads, and which might have prompted him to take a circuitous route homewards.

Whichever way she considered it, the subject naturally tended greatly to depress her, and the attitude of her eldest boy, Sohei, whose

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quick sympathies were aroused by his mother's obvious anxiety, though he could not, of course, divine the primary cause of it, troubled her yet more, as he from time to time cast inquiring glances in her direction. Not to worry her by asking questions, however, he busied himself in adding fresh fuel to the little pile glowing in the centre, and in tracing patterns with the aid of the fire-tongs among the ashes that, in a deep layer, were arranged around the burning charcoal on the hearth. Gennosuké, aged nine, Kihachi, whose years numbered but six, and Sannosuké, a mere baby, were all three dozing on the matted floor close by, palpably fatigued with the frolics of the day.

"My dear children," said Tsuta, suddenly bestirring herself as she caught sight of her slumbering boys, "you will surely take cold ; you must be off to your beds at once."

Thus awakened, one of the little fellows, Gennosuké, artlessly inquired—

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"Was I dreaming, mother? I thought that father had come back, and had brought me a beautiful present—a toy sword."

"Mother," cried Kihachi, the third son, "when will father come home? To-day we were playing at soldiers, and I wanted to be an officer, but the boys said I could not be one, because I had no father at my home. I do wish father would come back quickly. Tell me, mother dear, when will he come?"

"He will be here as soon as his business is finished, dear," answered Tsuta, in caressing tones.

"But he has been gone so long," urged Gennosuké.

"Yes, he has. But if you are good children, and wait for him patiently, he will bring nice things for you, and Kihachi will be made an officer at once. Sohei, it is late. Will you conduct your brothers to bed? I will take the youngest."

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So saying, the mother caught up Sannosuké, who was still asleep, in her arms, and disappeared into an inner apartment with her little family.

A little while afterwards a voice was heard without, and some one shouted—

“Madam! madam! have you no tidings yet of the master?”

Tsuta, returning to the front room, found that the caller was one Tarosuké, whose occupation was that of a public servant of the lowest grade. It was his office to distribute circulars, to serve summonses upon the villagers, and otherwise to perform duties of a kind that ensured to the holder of the berth the minimum of respect and likewise of emolument.

Not infrequently the occupant of such a post was, in addition, a spy and common informer. But in a village, where others of his species are necessarily scarce—the entire population being but small—a man of this

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type becomes, in his own eyes, a person of no little importance, and the airs that he is apt to give himself are genuinely entertaining to the onlookers. It is his habit to style himself a clerk in the service of the local government, when a more appropriate title would be that of bailiff, or perhaps "jack-of-all-trades."

"Oh, is it you, Mr. Tarosuké?" said Tsuta, coming forward. "Surely the messages that you have to deliver must be urgent ones, or you would not be out on such a bleak night as this?"

"Yes, madam; very urgent indeed."

"Come in and warm yourself before you go on," said Tsuta.

"Thank you, madam; thank you," said Tarosuké, promptly taking advantage of her courteous invitation and seating himself at the fireplace. "Are the children asleep, mistress?" he inquired. "How desolate the house seems!" he added, puffing out the

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tobacco-smoke from his pipe as he did so, and glancing around.

Tsuta was rather vexed with the fellow's free-and-easy behaviour, but did not wish to offend him because of his well-known propensity for circulating malicious stories. So she made a virtue of necessity, and, having brewed some tea afresh, said—

“It is kind of you to make inquiries. Will you take a cup?”—handing it to him as she spoke.

“Thank you, mistress; thank you,” was his answer. “And now listen to me one moment. Your house is that of the hereditary head-man of Kodzu, but, by the ill-advised acts of its master, its fortunes are on the decline. All the servants have been sent away, and you, the daughter of the late Mr. Soyemon, are doing all sorts of rough work with these pretty, soft little hands.”

And with that the impudent rascal abruptly seized Tsuta's hands in his powerful grip.

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Indignant beyond words at this rudeness, Tsuta snatched away her hands, and cried out—

“Stand off, fellow ! How dare you ? Have you forgotten that I am the wife of Kiuchi Sogoro ?”

Taken aback for the moment by this rebuff, but persevering in his attack, the presumptuous scoundrel said—

“No, I have not forgotten it ; but Sogoro, I tell you, will never return alive. You and your children will need a protector, and will find in me a worthy person. Besides, I should make an excellent successor to Sogoro as head-man of the village, if you would hearken to what I have to say.”

“Insolent creature ! My husband is doing his duty as head-man still by being in Yedo.”

“Nay, fair mistress ; you are deceived. He is accused of being the prime instigator of all the disturbances, and if he ventures to

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return hither he will be arrested, imprisoned, and very probably beheaded."

Observing the profound effect which his words produced, he boldly continued—

"But by virtue of my office, it is in my power to warn him away, so that he need not risk his life by coming back. I will obtain from him a bill of divorce, setting you free, and then you can be mine."

Overwhelmed with mortification at finding herself the object of this villain's outrageous suggestions, Tsuta turned pale and trembled in her indignation. What she would have said in reply when she had recovered her breath, can never be known, for at that moment her eldest son, Sohei, partially opened the sliding screens which separated her apartment from that which the three boys occupied, and, popping in his head for an instant, called out loudly—

"Mother! mother! Uncle of the Buchoji temple!"

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"What?" stammered the process-server. "Kozen here! The priest is a most unwelcome visitor!" and, taking to his heels there and then, Tsuta's iniquitous suitor quickly disappeared—not, however, without firing a parting shot—

"I will come again, fair one; do not forget what I have said."

The fellow's insults stung Tsuta to the quick. Her unprotected condition became more than ever manifest to her as she realized that, but for Sogoro's long absence, not even the boldest would have dared to make such audacious propositions.

In a few seconds, however, she recovered her self-possession, and, calling to Sohei, she asked him—

"Where is uncle?" adding, "Show him in, dear; I am longing to see him."

"I did not say that he had come, mother. His very name was enough to frighten that man, and cause him to run away."

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"Was that a ruse of yours, my darling boy, to aid me?" asked Tsuta.

"Yes, mother. But do not be agitated, I pray: if you were to fall ill now, who would protect us, mother dear?"

"Instead of my protecting you, my child, it is you who have protected me, clever Sohei! You are a worthy son of an excellent father!" said the mother, fondly embracing her boy. "But," she continued, "the night is far advanced, and you must take your rest. Do not be uneasy about me any further."

"Good night, then, mother," responded Sohei; and, with a low bow to her, he crept back to his bed.

Left alone, Tsuta's thoughts reverted to the miseries of her position, and her mind became filled with foreboding. The prolonged absence of her husband on a mission of extreme danger; the lack of all tidings concerning him or his whereabouts; the

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increasing difficulty of accounting to the little ones for their father's silence, and of replying to their very natural inquiries as to when he would rejoin them ; the failure of Kozen to return from Yedo ; the utterly unprotected state of herself and her family, as exemplified by the loathsome overtures of the scoundrel Tarosuké ; and, finally, the dread that at the end of it all might come the crowning calamity of losing her husband by the sword of the executioner, weighed so heavily upon her brain that she felt herself becoming bewildered by the mere contemplation of her woes.

For a time her faculties seemed to be paralyzed, but eventually she rose to her feet with a sigh, and said half aloud, " Mere lamentation will not improve matters. I must pray to the gods for help."

Lighting a candle by the spark of flint and steel (for any less pure source of fire would have been sacrilegious), she placed it,

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together with a flagon of rice wine, upon the family altar, and knelt down before it reverently, to appeal to the Unseen for help and courage to meet the disasters that she seriously feared were impending.

CHAPTER VIII

A FAREWELL VISIT

THE heavy fall of snow, after a brief interval, recommenced with added fury, and the large flakes, driven before a violent northerly gale, obscured the track and lay deep in the drifts. Few indeed were the temptations to loiterers to remain out-of-doors on such a night, and Sogoro, whose desire it was to avoid recognition by friends as much as by foes, felt that in this one respect, at all events, circumstances rather favoured him. Drawing his hat well over his features, and wrapping his kappa tightly around him, he pressed forward in the direction of his home. As he fought his way with steady strides against the wind, he was struck with the

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parallel between his own career and the fate of something that he saw lying by the wayside.

"Like that castaway scarecrow," he muttered, "which is valued only so long as the farmer has need of its services, and when done with is thrown out of the way to decay, or perhaps serve as fuel in some kitchen fireplace, so is the man who may seek to benefit his fellow-men likely to fare in the end. The scarecrow helps to preserve the crops whilst they are ripening, and when the corn has been gathered its utility is no longer recognized. A public benefactor may be appreciated whilst his work is in progress, but the moment that it is completed he ceases to be an object of interest, and no one seems willing to give a second thought to the services that he may have rendered."

. But Sogoro was not the kind of man to allow his sense of duty to be dulled by reflections such as these. He shook off his

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melancholy as he neared his house, and, lest there should be spies thereabouts, he made his way to the rear of the building, from which he at once caught a glimpse of his wife, as she knelt before the domestic shrine, in fervent prayer.

"O Tsuta, O Tsuta," he called to her in a low tone.

His wife, fearing that she was to be the recipient of further attentions from the villain Tarosuké, but resolved not to show any fear of him, answered with affected calm—

"Who is it that comes hither at this hour of the night? Any one who has business should wait until to-morrow." Inwardly, however, she appealed to all the gods to rescue her from her peril.

"My dearest wife," said Sogoro, moving to the doorway, "what terrible anxiety I must have caused you by my long absence!"

"Is it really you, my dear husband?" O Tsuta asked, "or am I dreaming?"—

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running towards him, while tears of joy streamed down her pale cheeks. Sogoro wept also as he took her in his arms.

"It is too much to think of," the wife said. "I have been without you for fully three months, and you have not communicated with me even once. It may be that in this enterprise your honour was at stake, as head-man of the village; but it certainly was not right and natural for you, as husband and father, to be away so long without writing to us!" And as she recounted to him all that had occurred to distress them at home in his absence, she could not refrain from weeping afresh at the recollection.

In fact, though Tsuta was convinced, as an intelligent and withal a brave woman, of the necessity and righteousness of the course her husband was pursuing, she was overwhelmed at his sudden and altogether unlooked-for return, and was unable at first to obtain any relief for the pent-up emotions of

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her overburdened heart other than in floods of tears.

Waiting until she had a little recovered herself, Sogoro presently assured her—

“It has been neither from lack of affection, nor from indifference to the needs of my family, that I have stayed in Yedo so long. No doubt you have heard of the result of our sojourn there from my uncle Kozen?”

“Indeed I have not. He has not yet returned,” said Tsuta.

“Ah! then he is making a *détour*, most likely, to avoid coming into contact with the officials. Naturally, he travels but slowly, in any case. Let me explain to you all that has happened.”

And Sogoro then acquainted his wife of his resolve to take upon himself the fulfilment of the enterprise, by delivering the petition into the Shogun's own hands.

“If,” he went on to say, “the presentation of such a document to the lord of the province

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was likely to involve capital punishment, an attempt to hand the petition to the Shogun himself must inevitably end in death, seeing that the offence is so much more heinous. But I am impelled, by considerations of duty to Heaven and man, to run any and every risk. I cannot draw back, for the name I bear must never be sullied by my remissness. But I am determined, nevertheless, to deprive the tyrants of the opportunity they might otherwise seize to wreak their vengeance upon my innocent wife and family. Accordingly, I am prepared, my dear Tsuta, to dissolve our marriage tie, by giving to you in writing a formal divorce. But think not that this act of mine implies any diminution of affectionate regard for you and our little ones, for it is, in truth, a proof to the contrary."

Sogoro, with these words, placed on his wife's lap the document he alluded to, and which, by a set phraseology and close adherence to a time-honoured method of framing it, has

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come to be generally spoken of as a "three-lines-and-a-half" letter.

Tsuta started as though stabbed to the heart at this new phase of calamity, and it seemed to be the culminating point of her many sorrows. But she rose to the occasion, and, in a tone of remonstrance, said—

"It is absolutely cruel of you to pretend that in me you have a wife who would cling despicably to mere existence after witnessing her husband's noble sacrifice of his own life for others' good. Do you forget that I am the daughter of Kiuchi Soyemon?"

Sogoro was silent for the moment, and Tsuta continued, a little resentfully—

"Is it your wish that your wife should be looked upon with contempt by all who know her, as a woman unworthy to have borne your name, whilst your conduct is being extolled to the skies as that of a true patriot? No matter what form it may take, let me share your death; be it by fire, or be it by water, I shall

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not flinch. The villagers who owe you so much already, and your uncle Kozen, who is ever disposed to be kind, will surely between them look after our children ! This 'bill of divorce' is beyond endurance hateful and insulting ;" and, snatching up the document, she tore it to atoms and flung the scraps into the fire.

Sogoro fixed his eyes upon her in manifest pride and admiration.

"You are now what you always were to me, wife—a woman to gladden my heart and lighten my troubles. You have endeared yourself to me tenfold by what you have just said and done. Wake up the children, dear, and let me say farewell. You and I are of one mind, wife, and the sooner that I set out to perform my final task the better."

Obediently to the mother's summons, Sohei came in promptly and bowed respectfully to his father, the younger ones following and embracing their parent, whilst little Sannosuké climbed upon his knee.

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"Father," said Sohei, "we are delighted at your return."

"Father, father," echoed the little ones, "we have been good children ; please to show us the presents you have brought for us."

Caressing them all most tenderly, Sogoro assured them that their mother would have something nice for them on the morrow, and turning to his heir, he said—

"Sohei, my son, you are yet young, but upon you will some day devolve the maintenance of the honour of our house. Listen to me attentively. Should you be glad to hear your father praised by all the inhabitants of the four hundred villages in our lord's domain, or would it please you to find your parent censured and held up to derision as one who had failed in his duty ? Answer me."

"Of course I should wish to hear you praised, father, as you always have been," said the boy.

"Well said, my brave lad," cheerily

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responded his father. "And now I am going again to Yedo to beg the Shogun's favour for the tens of thousands of people who dwell in this province, and they will all be glad of it one day. So you will await my happy return." To his wife he added, "We will drink the wine of felicitation—a parting cup to the success of the undertaking. If you have no wine at hand, let us drink it in water; the wish will be the same."

"Nay, dear husband; we will do better still. Not only shall it be wine, but wine which the gods have blessed. Only this evening I made an offering of *saké* to our guardian deities, and with their approval, which we will implore, we will bid you farewell in this consecrated wine, and beg the special protection of the gods for you, our head."

Reverently she removed the flagon and its ~~tiny~~ cup of unglazed earthenware from before the shrine, and set them in front of her husband.

"Hearty congratulations to us all, and

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hopes for success in the final stage of a glorious enterprise !” said Sogoro, as he raised the cup. “Pour out for me, my precious wife.”

“Yes, husband,” she said ; but her hand shook, and she was incapable for the moment of doing or saying more.

But at a glance of encouragement from Sogoro she braced herself for the effort, lest the children should wonder at her agitation, and contrived to fill the cup.

Sogoro drank the wine at once, and passed the cup to Sohei.

“You will join me, my son, in the toast ?”

“Yes, father,” said the boy, sobbing.

“What ! tears, my lad, and on such an occasion !”

“I will drink to your success, father, but I dread to think,” stammered poor Sohei, now fairly broken-hearted, “that if you go again to Yedo, we shall never see you more, and this is an eternal farewell.”

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"Dear child," said his mother ; " then you have heard what your father and I were talking about ? "

" Yes, yes," sobbed the lad ; " I awoke at the first sound of father's voice, and I could not help hearing what was said. When your business is finished, dear father," Sohei continued, " you will try to return to us as best you can, will you not ? "

Tsuta turned her head away, for she could not conceal her emotion on hearing the little fellow's anxious pleading, and Sogoro was himself visibly affected, but he answered encouragingly—

" What I told your mother was only by way of preparing her for the worst, as it were. But it is not probable that matters will come to such a pass. Very likely I shall come back on horseback, with a lance carried in front of me."

Sogoro's allusion was to the formality observed in feudal days when a samurai was

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promoted to equestrian rank, and became entitled to use a lance in battle. A military official of this grade, when he rode out even in peace times, had his lance, with its point sheathed, borne in front of his horse by an attendant on foot, as a mark of his dignity.

But there were other circumstances under which a man might ride on horseback and have a lance carried in front of him, as Sogoro well knew, and thus his suggestion as to the manner of his return had a double meaning. Under the old *régime* in Japan, a malefactor who was condemned to crucifixion was bound hand and foot to the saddle of a pack-horse, and a lance—but with its point unsheathed in this case—was borne in front of him as the animal he bestrode made the circuit of the locality in which the condemned had had his home. All this took place on the way to the execution-ground.

Sogoro left his son to infer that it was the

A Farewell Visit

former of these equestrian journeys that they might all look forward to seeing the head of the family undertake, and Sohei, knowing nothing of the sinister interpretation which might likewise be put upon his father's words—for crucifixion, even in those dark days of Japan's history, was extremely rare—blithely answered—

“If it should be so, how greatly we shall all rejoice!” And now what shall I do with this cup, father?”

“Pass it on to your brothers,” was the command; and under the mother's eye the boys each took a sip in the order of their age. Finally, Tsuta filled the little cup for herself, and after emptying it she said firmly, addressing her husband—

“The burden of our leave-taking will not be lightened by talking of what may come. Spies are continually on the watch to see if you and your companions have returned to Kodzu. If the day dawns before you set out you may

For his People

be intercepted. Therefore it will be better for you to depart soon."

"Well said, wife!" returned Sogoro. "I rely upon you for everything that concerns the family after I am gone."

"Ease your mind on that score, dear husband; I trust that you will not fail at the critical moment through anxiety as to what may be happening at home."

This she tried to say in an inspiring tone; but, in spite of her courage, her voice faltered, and the effort was but partially successful.

"Now that I know that your resolve is as steadfast as my own, dear Tsuta, rest assured that I shall not fail. I need have no other thought than for the accomplishment of my design. Good-bye, my children. Farewell, my faithful wife. May Heaven grant that we all meet again—in the next world, if not in this!"

And as he strode away rapidly Sogoro

A Farewell Visit

seemed to hear through the darkness the voices of his little ones, crying to him, "Father, father, come again soon!"

Tsuta's overstrained feelings were too much for her, and the moment that her husband's retreating footsteps could no longer be heard, she burst into a paroxysm of weeping, in which the children, seeing her grief, loudly joined. For three months she had looked and longed for news of Sogoro, and when at last he had appeared on the scene, it was only to rack her soul still further with that terrifying information which he had made this stolen visit to his home to convey to her. No wonder was it that at last her fortitude, trained though she had been to face reverses of fortune with the calmness and resolution of a daughter of Japan, entirely gave way. As a true wife she had been compelled to keep up appearances, and even to counsel her husband to persevere in his endeavours, the while her bosom was torn with the most poignant sorrow that it had ever been her lot

For his People

to endure. To urge him to go, when her heart had bidden her to implore him to stay ; to speak words of encouragement and farewell at the same time whilst her woman's nature revolted at the prospect of losing her protector for ever ; —these were tasks that only the most sublime conceptions of wifely duty could possibly have enabled her to fulfil.

Concealed in the shadows, at a no great distance from the house, the spy Kiyemōn had been watching all the time.

Hearing the wailing that followed Sogoro's departure, but mistaking its real cause, and fancying that the head-man of Kodzu must be within doors, the despicable creature forced his way in amongst the sorrow-stricken household and exclaimed—

“By your outcry I feel certain Sogoro has returned to see you. Where is he ?”

“He is not here,” answered Tsuta, her anger rising at this unwarrantable intrusion.

“Do not prevaricate, woman. The traveller

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whom I caught sight of at the ferry, and the one I afterwards passed on the road, were doubtless the same person, and no other than your husband. He must be here. Tell me where he is hiding."

"It is true that he came back, but he has gone out again, to see his uncle of the Buchoji temple."

"No such thing! You cannot deceive me. Kozen has not yet returned from Yedo; and, besides, I have a man at the temple on the look-out. But I have no time to lose. I will follow Sogoro and arrest him. He must have taken the road back to the ferry."

So saying, he was in the act of quitting the house, when Tsuta threw herself in his way.

"No, no! You shall not go!" she cried, determined to delay his departure as long as her woman's strength permitted her to oppose him, and so allow of her husband's obtaining a good start.

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"Do not hinder me, woman. Hands off, I tell you!"

"Not whilst I have power to hold you!" cried Tsuta, and she clung to him with all her might.

"If so, it must be in this way," the spy muttered, and struck her there and then a severe blow with his clenched fist, which had the effect of stretching the poor woman in a swoon upon the matted floor. The scoundrel then ran away in pursuit of Sogoro.

During this brief scuffle the children had not known what to do, but when Tsuta fell Sohei ran to her and called out in an agonized voice, "Mother! mother!"

In a few seconds she recovered herself so far as to be able, by a stupendous effort, to rise to her feet. Then, saying to Sohei, "My son, you will look to the fastenings, and take care of your brothers. Let no one enter whilst mother is absent," Tsuta ran,

A Farewell Visit

with all the speed of which she was capable, in chase of the spy, towards Hirakawa ferry, in the hope of reaching it in time to be of help to Sogoro should he be attacked.

CHAPTER IX

SOGORO IN PERIL

WITH the near approach of dawn the snow-clouds were driven away before the gale, and a bright moon, as yet but little past its full, shone clearly in the western sky. From the high ground above, as he strode along, Sogoro could discern the full extent of Inba's waters, outspread as they were before him, in the form of a gigantic letter W.

The sloping roofs of Sakura, glistening in the brilliant moonlight, rose in the distance, tier above tier, to where the massive walls and towers of the castle, thickly coated with snow, sprang from the hillside and stood boldly out against the already reddening eastern horizon.

Sogoro in Peril

Visible in the foreground was Masakado-yama, where the peasants' fateful demonstration had taken place a few months previously, and close to a clump of pine trees, away towards the right, stood Sogoro's house.

The anxious husband and father gazed long and fondly upon a scene that, familiar as its salient features had been to him from childhood, had at no time in his recollection seemed so weirdly beautiful as at that moment, conscious as he was that never again would his eyes rest upon its wondrous combination of mountain, wood, and lake—never more would he be privileged to rest his head beneath the shelter of his own roof.

The conviction that he must hasten forward if he would avoid recognition, however, urged him again towards the ferry; but he had not gone far before a muffled figure emerged suddenly from a by-path and barred the way.

Sogoro saw at once that it was Kiyemon

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who thus ventured to dispute the passage; but, drawing his hat well over his face, and moving quickly, he endeavoured to pass on, affecting not to notice the spy's presence.

"Stay one moment, head-man of Kodzu," cried the other. "You surely have not forgotten Kiyemon of Inba?"

Thus accosted, Sogoro had no alternative but to reply, and, taking off his hat, he bowed civilly to his questioner and said—

"I beg your pardon; is it really Mr. Kiyemon? My son is unwell, and I must hasten to procure medicine for him. Excuse my rudeness;" and with that he would have hurried on, but Kiyemon shouted—

"Wait, Mr. Sogoro. You may be in haste, but I also have pressing business to settle with you."

Sogoro, still wishful to avoid any altercation, said in a half-jocular way—

"Well, then, out with it. I am all attention."

Sogoro in Peril

"Good. I am under strict orders to arrest the prime instigators of the recent disturbances among the peasantry. Already I have several under lock and key, but the seven actual leaders of the riots are still at large, including yourself. Now, as you observe, it is my duty to take you prisoner forthwith, but as we are old acquaintances, I am willing to give you a chance. If you tell me where you are going, and where your accomplices are now to be found, I may be able to arrange matters without causing you much inconvenience."

"You are most kind, I am sure," said Sogoro, comprehending the fellow's design. "As you are of course aware, the villagers were about to create serious disturbances on account of the increase in taxation. But we took it upon ourselves to promise to go up to Yedo, to make an appeal to his lordship, and we actually went there. We were, however, refused admittance to his mansion. In a way,

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the whole thing was a ruse on our part to escape our responsibility for the disturbances that might arise, and at the same time to induce the people to believe that we were doing everything for them that was possible. A sufficient time, as we thought, having elapsed, I came back to Kodzu last evening, but as I find the danger of misunderstanding has not entirely been removed, 'I am again going adrift into the world for a while. I trust you will sympathize with me, and allow me to depart on my journey, for old acquaintance' sake."

"Aha! listen to that for a tale! I was at your house less than an hour ago, and heard your wife talking—to herself, I suppose—about your going up to Yedo to appeal directly to the Shogun. If soft words will not persuade you to tell the truth, I shall arrest you, and you will be made to confess under torture. So prepare yourself to be bound as my prisoner."

Sogoro in Peril

Sogoro had heard enough. He drew the sword which he wore, and which he had the right to carry in his girdle as head-man of his village, and fell upon his enemy with vigour.

But Kiyemon was an expert in *jujutsu*, the Japanese art of self-defence.

He dodged his opponent's onslaught, and, rushing in, struck a sharp blow with his fist on Sogoro's arm in such a way as to cause the weapon to fly from the swordsman's grasp. Then the two men wrestled in the snow that lay deep on the ground.

Sogoro proved to be no match for his adversary at this exercise either, and in a few seconds Kiyemon was victorious. Kneeling upon his victim, he sought for the knot of cord which he usually carried in an inner pocket, in readiness for emergencies.

But on this occasion the cord was missing, and Kiyemon, little suspecting that the ferryman was a staunch friend to Sogoro, shouted at the top of his voice to Jimbei to come to

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his assistance, saying, "Hasten; Jimbei; bring a rope! I have caught Sogoro."

Little did Kiyemon dream, moreover, that reinforcements for Sogoro were then close at hand; but Tsuta was within a few yards of him at that moment, and, quickly realizing the position in which her husband was placed, she hurried up and seized the spy by his queue. With all her strength she sought to drag him backwards, and taking advantage of a momentary release from the heavy pressure of the other man's weight, Sogoro rolled clear, and promptly began to turn the tables upon his persecutor.

Kiyemon, taken in front and rear, screamed for Jimbei to come to his aid, but the latter rushed up and administered such a thrust beneath the ribs with the sharp point of the boat oar which he carried, as sufficed to terminate for ever the spy's career.

Their danger being for the moment removed, husband and wife found breath to

Sogoro in Peril

Thank the ferryman for his timely help, and did so in words expressive of their heartfelt gratitude, but Jimbei would listen to nothing they said.

"Do not thank me," he cried; "all that I have done is but a poor requital of the many kindnesses shown me by your father. It is nearly daylight. Let me row you in my boat, Sogoro, as far up the lake as I can, for the journey by road is beset with difficulties."

"It is too great a strain for one of your age," Tsuta said hesitatingly.

"Not in the least. Old as I am, I can work as hard as any man in his prime. Say good-bye to your wife, and jump in, my friend, at once. We must not lose another instant."

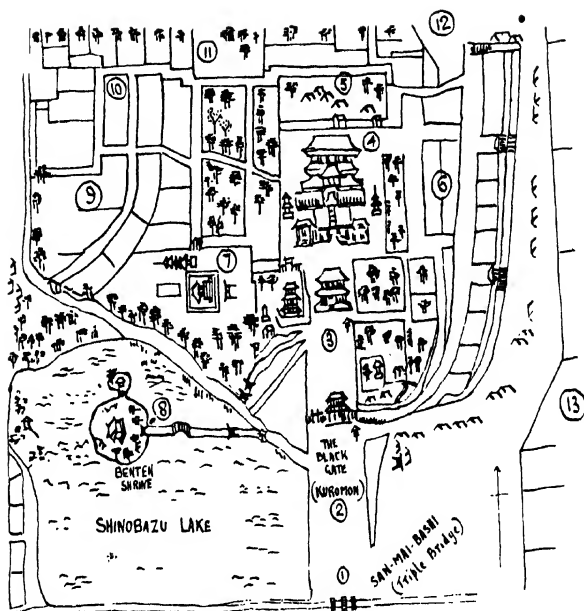
So saying, he dragged the body of the dead Kiyemon to the brink of the lake, and gave it a push which sent it to the bottom.

"Farewell, once more, my precious Tsuta," said Sogoro, springing into the punt alongside Jimbei.

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“Farewell, my ——” But the words she would have spoken failed her, for her emotion choked her utterance.

Sogoro last saw her waving her hand to him as she stood alone at the water's edge.



THE TEMPLES AND LAKE AT UENO.

1. Where Sogoro presented the petition.
2. The "Black Gate"—since demolished.
3. Bronze figure of Amida—"Dai-Butsu."
4. Principal temple (Kwanyejiji) destroyed by fire during hostilities in 1868. The site has in recent years been occupied by an Exhibition.
5. Formerly the high priest's residence : now the site of the Ueno Museum.
6. Also 9, 10, 11, and 12. Auxiliary temples.
7. Shrine erected in memory of Iyeyasu, the founder of the Tokugawa line of Shoguns.
8. Shrine on islet, dedicated to the goddess Benten.
13. Present position of Ueno Railway Terminus.

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CHAPTER X

UYENO

UYENO, the scene of Sogoro's immortal exploit (the adjective is permissible, since we are dealing, not with fiction but, in the main, with historical fact, and fact, moreover, of a kind that for the Japanese people will never lose one atom of the absorbing interest which it possesses), is now one of the public parks of Tokio.

From very ancient times the beautiful grounds that enclose its gorgeous temples have been famous for their annual displays of the flowering cherry, thousands of these trees, many exceeding two yards in girth and fifty feet in height, lining the by-paths and broad walks. In springtime, when the flowers are at

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their best, the magnificent spectacle presented by the dense masses of pink and white bloom, and the very palpable delight that the crowds of sightseers take in traversing the petal-strewn avenues, and breathing the perfume-laden air, combine to afford fascinating pictures of true Japanese life. The people of Tokio exhibit at all times a generous appreciation of Nature's glories, and it cannot be denied that they have, in the capital and its environs, abundant means at their disposal for the gratification of their tastes in this direction.

The park is situated at the extremity of a range of low hills which embrace the northern portion of the city, and, from its elevated site, commands a prospect of almost the whole area. To the westward, at the foot of the hill, the large circular lake of Shinobazu, three miles round, reveals its broad expanse, its waters half hidden during the greater part of the year by the emerald of the Lotus Nymphaea. In summer the rosy flowers spring from the midst of

Uyeno

the green foliage, and load the atmosphere with their delicate fragrance.

The middle of the lake is occupied by an island temple dedicated to the goddess Benten, the shrine being reached by traversing a long causeway, with a bridge in the centre of picturesque design. The lake was, indeed, a strikingly befitting adjunct to the wooded richness of the hill above it, and it still may be said in a measure to harmonize therewith, though an incongruous element has recently been introduced, in the shape of a racecourse, the track having been laid over land reclaimed from the lake. Thus it is that to the vandalism of a race-club we owe the partial destruction of one of the prettiest views that Tokio could of old claim to possess.

Originally Uyeno was known as Shinobuga-Ôka. In the sixteenth century the castle of a feudal chieftain was erected on the site, and at a later date, after the city of Yedo had become the seat of government under the first of the

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Tokugawa Shoguns, the place was held by a nobleman named To-Do, who was high in the favour of the Shogun named, the famous Iyeyasu.

To-Do offered to relinquish his rights if the Shogun who had succeeded Iyeyasu ~~would~~ consent to the erection of a shrine in honour of the dead ruler, to whose patronage To-Do owed in great measure his own high position. The Shogun having assented, a group of noble edifices, each one designed to fulfil some lofty purpose, rose upon the excellent site which the elevated plateau at Uyeno afforded. The shrines were decorated in most lavish style, with gilded and enamelled woodwork and massive bronze and copper ornamentation. Delicate tracery and rich embellishment of every kind known to Japanese art were brought to bear, and aided in the magnificent schemes of the XVIIth-century architect, and, in addition to the splendid building in honour of the founder of the Tokugawa line of

Uyeno

Shoguns, Uyeno was enriched with pagodas and towers, with libraries and colleges for the study of Buddhistic literature, and with extensive dormitories for the convenience of hundreds of students, the supreme control of the institution being conferred upon a prince of the Imperial house, whose stately palace and spacious grounds were situated where the National Museum stands to-day.

It was commonly believed that by thus establishing in the heart of the capital a functionary allied by blood to the sovereign, who was in those days never seen outside his palace at Kioto, the Shogun would at all times be in a position to lay hands upon a counterpoise to the imperial authority in the event of the Kioto monarch seeking to extinguish the Shogunate by force of arms. That such a contingency was not to be regarded as remote in those days can readily be understood from the fact that two or three attempts to abolish the office had been made by previous emperors

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in the earlier years of the Shogunate's existence. An imperial prince in residence at Uyeno was in a sense a hostage for the complacent acquiescence of the real ruler at Kioto in the acts of his deputy at Yedo, and, had the reigning Emperor thought fit to raise an army in the Kioto region for the suppression of the Shogun, this Uyeno archbishop would have been elevated, in the eyes of the nobles of the north, and of the people generally, to a still higher position, for the Shogun would have sought to invest him with full imperial powers.

In the end the very contingency which the Shogun sought to avoid, was brought about by influences altogether beyond his control, but not until 1868, when the office was abolished for ever. During the civil war which arose over the deposition of the Shogun, in that year, the beautiful edifices of Uyeno suffered heavily. A numerous party of Tokugawa samurai occupied the place as a fitting one in which to make

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a last stand against the forces of the Emperor, and for one entire day the battle raged there, to the complete destruction of most of the magnificent temples, and even of a large proportion of the cherry trees. Only a few of the buildings were left intact, and those owed their safety mainly to their isolated positions in remote corners of the temple grounds.

In the years that have elapsed since Uyeno was the scene of this desperate conflict much has been done to revive its former glories, and whilst its ancient monuments have been preserved from further mutilation, its usefulness as a place of public resort has been vastly enhanced by the provision of an educational museum and zoological garden, a fine arts exhibition and a college of music. Periodical displays of art products and manufactures are held there, and the park is now a favourite place of recreation for the hundreds of thousands of people who dwell in the capital and its

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environs. Uyenô is as popular, indeed, as Asakusa, but while the latter place is not free, it must be admitted, from a certain vulgarity, at Uyenô the visitor finds nothing, apart from the newly established racecourse, that can be deemed incongruous.

On the twentieth day of the twelfth month, in the second year of Showô era, corresponding to A.D. 1653, the Shogun then holding that high office, and who was the fourth of the Tokugawa line, was to visit, according to previous announcement, one of the ancestral shrines of his family in the Uyenô grounds. This duty was performed annually, and was always made the occasion of an impressive ceremony, and much imposing display. Immense preparations, under the old *régime*, had to be made for the passage of the Shogun's procession to and from the temple, and the priests in charge, together with the domestics, were perpetually engaged for days and weeks beforehand in making ready the interior of

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the sacred building for the great event of the ecclesiastical year. From the triple bridge at the front entrance to the sacred enclosure, the roadway had to be cleansed, swept, and strewn with fresh sand all the way to the "Kuromon," or Black Gate. The triple bridge across the tiny stream that formed the boundary was termed the "Sammai bashi," and it was beneath its central arch that Sogoro had planned to secrete himself until the precise moment arrived for thrusting forward his petition. It was part of his design to smuggle himself among the crowd of gossiping, wrangling, and prank-playing servants, engaged in sweeping and sanding the track, until a favourable opportunity, created by the domestics' absorption in their own affairs, should arise for him to slip out of sight beneath the timbers of the structure over which the Shogun would be obliged to pass.

All went well with the petitioner in that, clad in a raincoat made of threaded reeds,

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such as is worn by farm-labourers to this day, and wearing a hat of great size, he escaped observation, and safely climbed down to his hiding-place in good time.

As the forenoon advanced the army of servants and others withdrew behind the front gate and silently awaited the coming of the procession. Presently from a distance were heard the cries of the heralds, announcing the approach of the mighty Shogun, and shortly afterwards his vanguard, every member of it bearing aloft a long spear, passed by, followed by bearers of gilded boxes attached to poles carried on the shoulders, one box to each man. All crossed by the central bridge, and were immediately followed by a company of archers, bearing their bows and quivers; the next to appear being a number of footguards leading richly-caparisoned horses. Behind these, at a few paces' distance, came the samurai, in quaint ceremonial dress, termed by some the "baiswing" style, but

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in reality resembling, at the shoulders, an inverted main-topgallant sail, and with their loose pantaloons—a sort of “divided skirt”—tucked up to their knees. All these samurai wore, by right of birth, two swords each, which were stuck through their girdles on the left side. Their hats were coloured to indicate the rank of the wearers. Men of the superior class wore headgear which was lacquered white outside and gold within—those of an inferior grade had head-coverings which were black without and vermilion within—but in both cases the family crests of the wearers were displayed on the hats, in front.

The samurai of old were careful to have their crests properly displayed, but there were never those distinctive patterns of dress or uniform indicative of membership of certain clans that various writers profess to have seen in times past, for the processions of the Shogun and those of the territorial magnates

For his People

termed *daimios* differed in naught but the number of their followers who took part in these functions. There was always ceremonial costume of some sort or other worn ; but, contrary to the notion that has by some writers been entertained, the samurai on these occasions wore no armour.

The tramp of hundreds of men on the march ceased as the last of the vanguard passed onwards, and the *norimono*, in which sat the Shogun, borne by four stout footmen, drew near to the bridge beneath which Sogoro was concealed. A moment later, and the bearers were in the act of traversing it, as Sogoro, who had been crouching during the last few seconds at the edge in breathless suspense, sprang suddenly out upon the bridge, and cried, "A petition, my lord ; a petition !" as he thrust the document, held in a cleft bamboo, within the screened window of the palanquin. The guards in immediate attendance upon his Highness were for the moment completely taken by



Sogoro sprang suddenly out upon the bridge.

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surprise, and were too late to offer any opposition to Sogoro's daring act. The Shogun, who was in no way disturbed, quietly grasped the folded paper, and nodded in a kindly way to the bold petitioner, who caught the glance, and felt that his mission had been fulfilled. Prostrating himself instantly, with his forehead to the boards of the bridge, in token of profound respect, Sogoro allowed himself to be bound, with his arms at his back, and was immediately carried off to prison. The *norimono* in which the Shogun rode was meanwhile borne away towards the "Black Gate."

Sogoro's petition, the actual text of which has been carefully preserved to the present hour, was to the following purport :—

For his People

A PRAYER FOR RELIEF FROM TAXATION WHICH HAS BEEN IMPOSED OVER AND ABOVE THE OFFICIAL ASSESSMENT.

To His Highness, the august and illustrious
Shogun :

We, the undersigned head-men of villages,
forming a deputation from the farmers
and peasants dwelling within the domain
of Sakura, humbly petition your lordship
as follows :—

1. The feof of the domain of Sakura was in former years held by the lord Doi, under whose authority all taxes, dues, and obligations of personal service on the part of the tenants were regularly enforced in strict accord with the rules and customs of ancient days.

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2. In the 19th year of Kwan-Yei era (A.D. 1642) ' the feof was transferred to the Lord Hotta, father of the present lord, and down to the 4th year of Keyan era (A.D. 1651) the imposts continued to be levied at the old rates.
3. On the 22nd day of the 4th month, in that year of Keyan, the present Lord Hotta succeeded to the domain on the death of his father, and in the autumn of the same year the tax upon rice was increased by twenty per cent.
4. Whereas formerly there were no imposts on the miscellaneous products of agriculture, apart from rice—such as peas, beans, flax, bran, straw ropes, etc.—and when the lord of the domain had need of such products, and they were supplied for his use, their equivalent values were invariably paid to the producers in the form of rice, since the accession of the present lord, all payments on this

For his People

account have ceased, and the miscellaneous products alluded to have to be furnished by the growers without any recompense whatever being made to them. On the contrary, their agricultural implements, which formerly were free of all imposts, have since the time mentioned been subjected to heavy duties.

5. As a consequence of these new impositions of taxes, many persons fell into arrears with the tax-gatherer, for it was impossible in the ordinary way to meet the demands, but the officials hardened their hearts, and would listen to no plea for exemption. Accordingly the farmers were driven to the necessity of cutting down their growing trees, regardless of the future, or of curtailing the wages paid to their labourers, and, in some cases, of actually dismissing them altogether, or of disposing by sale of their household goods and chattels and even

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of their clothing, in order to discharge their heavy liabilities.

6. The farmers, personally or by deputation, repeatedly sought to bring their troubles to the cognizance of the higher officials, but irrespective of the rank of the person appealed to, the result was ever the same, no notice being taken by any one, until at last efforts were made to reach the Lord Hotta in person. All attempts, however, to do so were frustrated by the officials.
7. Already no fewer than a hundred and eighty families, comprising seven hundred and thirty souls, have emigrated from the various villages of the domain to other provinces, and the lands which those emigrants once occupied are now uncultivated, and the homesteads are deserted. Eleven temples have been left unattended by any of the priesthood.
8. The exiles have, in many cases, been found

For his People

- in a state of absolute destitution, starving in a region far from their own homes. Others have been driven, by sheer want, to the commission of petty thefts, and, when convicted, have been sent back to their native province, their village head-men and elders having had to bear the obloquy of these misdeeds, and to accept the responsibility entailed, as well as to undergo punishment on the culprit's behalf.
9. It is to be feared, if the present condition of affairs continues much longer, that all the villages in the domain of Sukura will become desolate, to the immense loss and discredit of the State.
10. It is under these deplorable circumstances that we, the head-men of some of the villages, and representing the population of the domain, most humbly beseech the benevolent intervention and consideration of your august lordship, on behalf of the

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suffering people, knowing that it is the only course left to us by which we may hope to obtain relief, and with the ardent desire to prevent farther injury being done to the State.

Signed, in the twelfth month of the second year of Showo (A.D. 1653).

SOGORO, Chief of the Deputation,
and head-man of Kodzu.

ROKUROBEI, head-man of Takizawa.

HANJURO, head-man of Ko-idzumi.

JUYEMON, head-man of Katsuta.

CHUZO, head-man of Chiba.

SABUROBEI, head-man of Takano.

CHAPTER XI

SOGORO CONDEMNED

HOTTA MASANOBU, the feudal lord of Sakura, was summoned before the High Council of State, of which he was himself a member, but in this instance he attended its meeting in an unofficial capacity.

The petition which Sogoro had presented was then handed to him, and the Shogun at the same time directed that if the complaints were well-founded the wrongs of the people, as set forth in the document, should be immediately redressed. It was, moreover, declared to be the Shogun's express wish that the accused officials, as well as the petitioner, should be dealt with according to the merits of the case.

Sogoro condemned

The Lord Hotta had been kept in complete ignorance, by his scheming and corrupt agents at Sakura, of the events that had transpired within his domain. Even those who felt some compunction regarding the treatment of the peasantry had allowed themselves to be intimidated by the chief steward, and overawed into silence.

But in the eyes of other members of the council this formed, of course, no excuse, and the Lord Hotta merely asked for grace whilst he instituted a strict inquiry into the whole matter, not seeking to urge, at the time, any plea in defence of his own administration.

On returning to his mansion, he called together all the principal retainers and officers who were with him in Yedo, and questioned them minutely.

They readily confessed that a deputation of village head-men had several times presented themselves at the gate of the mansion, their

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avowed object being to proffer a petition, but as it was a strict rule that affairs of this nature should be left in the hands of the provincial authorities at Sakura, on every occasion that these head-men came they were refused admittance.

"But," remonstrated the Lord Hotta, in evident anger, "how came it to pass that not one of you took the trouble to apprise me of these visits?"

"Pardon me, my lord," said Ikéura, the samurai who once met Sogoro and his companions at the gatekeeper's lodge, "the chief steward conveyed to us, in your lordship's name, a very definite understanding that the new taxes to which allusion was made had been imposed for reasons of State, and that it was only to be expected that the people would, at the beginning, feel a little aggrieved at the increase of their burdens. It was urged that, should they be so ill-advised as to carry their complaints to headquarters at Yedo, they

Sogoro condemned

should be told to return to Sakura, where fair treatment would, of a certainty, be accorded them. It was pointed out that, by a trifling exercise of firmness at first, the people would soon be induced to accept the new order of things, but that any mistaken indulgence or sympathy would only have the effect of making them bold and disobedient. It was on this account that the deputation was ordered away, without our troubling your lordship with their grievances."

"Yes; I remember now," said the Lord Hotta. "It was not long after my accession to the fief that Daizen told me of a rebellion at Shimabara of the Christian converts, which had just been quelled, and soon after I was informed of a conspiracy headed by Yui Sho-shetsu, for a simultaneous rising against constituted authority in Osaka, Suruga, and Yedo, that was discovered by only the merest chance in time for steps to be taken to frustrate the design. Taking it altogether, it could not be

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said with perfect truth that the Empire was in a condition of absolute peace, and it was necessary, therefore, to be prepared for emergencies. It was to meet the expenses thus entailed that Daizen sought to obtain my sanction to a slight increase of taxation."

After musing awhile, Hotta Masanobu continued—

"Things have now come to such a pass that this wretched affair may not improbably prove the ruin of my house, and bring eternal disgrace upon my name. And the whole business has been brought about by that knave Sogoro!"

"I crave pardon, my lord," urged Ikéura. "Sogoro would never have done what he did but for the wrongful acts of your officials!"

"Silence!" thundered Hotta. "If you had acquainted me in time with what was taking place, I should not have been thus annoyed!"

Sogoro condemned

The truth was that the lord of the domain was exceedingly vexed and excited at the thought of how he had been shamed in the eyes of the world by Sogoro's transgression. He was seriously afraid, moreover, that the favour of the Shogun, which so far he had enjoyed on account of the services that his father had rendered to the State, would be extended to him no longer.

Presently he said, "You will at once transmit to Sakura my command that all taxes, dues, and personal services exacted beyond the limits which existed in the lifetime of my father be forthwith annulled. The penalty involved by a direct personal appeal to the Shogun is in any case that of death; but Sogoro, as he has chosen to ignore his liege lord, and to disgrace him before all men, deserves a doubly severe punishment. Let Sogoro, therefore, and his wife also, be crucified. Let his sons be

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beheaded. As to the six head-men, who were Sogoro's accomplices, let them be banished from my domain, and their properties confiscated."

"With profound respect for your decision, my lord," pleaded Ikéura, "the crucifixion of Sogoro, though a terrible punishment, may be merited, for he is the principal offender, but as to his wife, she may not have known what her husband was about to do. And even supposing that she was privy to his plans, how could she hope to dissuade him from taking those steps which he had resolved upon with his exalted ideas of benefiting the inhabitants of all the villages in your lordship's fief? I humbly beg that you will reconsider your decision in the woman's case, and show clemency to her and her children."

It was in this way that not alone Ikéura but others with him sought to persuade their lord to show mercy to those whom they deemed

Sogoro condemned

the innocent victims of Sogoro's wrong-headedness ; but arguments and prayers were alike in vain.

The at all times somewhat hasty temper of the Lord Hotta, coupled with his indignation at what he felt to be the irreparable injury done to his own reputation and influence, rendered him incapable of forming a dispassionate judgment upon the facts. He was exasperated beyond measure at Sogoro's presumption.

By his orders Sogoro, with Tsuta and the four boys, and the six head-men classed as accomplices, were all summoned to attend a court held in the Castle of Sakura, at which their sentences were read out to them as follows :—

I

“The six head-men named, having been in league against established authority to present

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a petition, contrary to law, direct to the Kogi (this was a respectful appellation of the Shogunate employed in official documents), their acts constituted a gross irreverence to the Kogi, and brought contumely upon the provincial government. Were justice alone consulted, these offences would be expiated only by the death of the six men indicated; but as they were not actually present at the time that the greater crime was perpetrated, their punishment is commuted, by the special grace of the lord of the domain, to perpetual exile beyond the radius of twenty-five miles from Sakura. Their lands are hereby confiscated, but their movable properties may be given to their families.

“Done in the third year of Showo (A.D. 1654).”

Sogoro condemned

II

“Sogoro, having induced the people to form a league against constituted authority, and having acted as the leader and instigator of disturbances, attempted to force the lord of the domain to give ear to unwarrantable and unreasonable complaints. This reprehensible design having been frustrated, he most offensively dared to appeal personally to the Kogi.

“These are most heinous crimes, for which he is hereby condemned to be crucified.

“Showo, 3rd year (A.D. 1654).”

.III

“Tsuta, wife of Sogoro, knowing that her husband was acting in defiance of the laws, and prejudicially to the lord of the domain, nevertheless permitted him to pursue his course

For his People

without making any effort to dissuade him therefrom. Her crime was as grave as that of her husband. She shall be crucified with him.

“Showo, 3rd year (A.D. 1654).”

IV

“Sohei, Gennosuké, Kihachi, and Sannosuké, the four sons of Sogoro, should by law suffer the same penalty as their parents, but in consideration of their tender age, it is hereby ordered that they be decapitated.

“Showo, 3rd year (A.D. 1654).”

When the promulgation of these sentences became known to the people of Sakura and the adjacent villages, they were exasperated beyond words at the conduct of the officials. Assembling in great numbers at a temple in the town of Sakura itself, they held a consultation

Sogoro condemned

regarding the steps which they should take ; but the advice tendered by three of the head-men present was to follow closely the policy always advocated by Sogoro, and avoid violence. Finally, it was resolved that these three head-men should proceed to Yedo and implore the Lord Hotta to show mercy to Sogoro's family.

When they reached the capital, however, the lord of Sakura flatly refused to see them, being still violently incensed against Sogoro and all belonging to him.

On their return to their native province, however, the three were permitted by the gaolers to see Sogoro in the prison where he was confined, and to which he had been taken back after hearing his sentence read out to him.

After acquainting him with the object of their ineffectual visit to Yedo, they assured him—

“All the villagers in our province are

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overwhelmed with gratitude and admiration, Sogoro, for what you have done in their cause. But they are enraged at the cruelty of the punishments decreed, and when the failure of our mission becomes noised abroad we do not answer for what may be the outcome of the people's wrath. They may take desperate means of wreaking vengeance on the officials."

Sogoro sorrowfully replied, "I am truly grateful for all you have done for me and mine. For myself, I always knew that my end would be crucifixion, and I feared my wife would not escape it either, knowing how merciless are our foes. But even of these fiends I had not thought it likely that they would go to such an extreme of savagery as to visit the offence of the father—which, properly speaking; never amounted to a crime—upon the heads of four innocent children."

"Yes, that is precisely the reason that all the people are so incensed against those in

Sogoro condemned

power, the while that we all grieve to think of the fate that is in store for you, our benefactor."

"Nevertheless," said Sogoro, "you must all of you try, with your utmost power, to check any rebellion among them, lest by not remaining quiet they give their enemies an opportunity to make further mischief. All that I have done, by way of a personal sacrifice, together with the loss of my beloved ones, will be utterly thrown away and our deaths will be altogether fruitless, if the people should be tempted to take any hasty action in consequence thereof. Let us leave it to the will of Heaven. Justice will be done in the end, we may be assured."

At that moment, as Sogoro ceased his exhortation, the gaoler entered and announced that the time allowed for the interview had expired.

The three head-men respectfully and sadly took their leave. It was said long afterwards

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that they had all entered a monastery, in order that they might devote themselves to prayer for the souls of Sogoro and his fellow-victims of tyranny.

CHAPTER XII

THE EXECUTION

THOUSANDS of people gathered at the appointed place, on the morning of the ninth day of the second month of the year which corresponded to A.D. 1654, to witness the final scene of the dismal tragedy that had been begun with Sogoro's bold championship of the peasants' cause, and was to end with the sacrifice of his life and of the lives of his innocent wife and family. It was not idle curiosity, nor was it a savage delight in the spilling of blood, that prompted the assembly of so many of the Lord Hotta's tenantry. It was the desire to secure a last glimpse of him whom they rightly regarded as their benefactor, in that he had succeeded in rescuing them from the

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tyranny of rapacious officials, and to unite in a fervent prayer for the souls of those who were to be executed, at the instant that the spirits of the victims should take their flight.

Behind a barricade that had been constructed of bamboos, in a space set apart for the purpose on an unenclosed pasture tract within the confines of Kodzu village, the fateful preparations went on uninterruptedly, and, at last, Sogoro, Tsuta, and their four children were led forth to die. The aged Kozen, with a large following of his fellow-priests from thirteen Buddhist temples in the neighbourhood, had been permitted to pass the barricade, and they had ranged themselves at one side, within the enclosure. All the condemned persons, the youngest children included, had had their arms and wrists bound together at their backs, a sight in itself so pitiful that it drew murmurs of remonstrance from the men in the crowd, and sobs from the women, as they realized the severity of the sentences that had been passed

The Execution

upon their friends—feelings that were intensified when the voice of Tsuta was heard imploring the officials present to have an end put to her existence and that of her husband there and then, instead of compelling them first to be witnesses of the killing of their beloved children.

Even this anguish was not spared the parents, however, as those in charge of the execution declared that the rule in such cases, that the least guilty should suffer first, and that the graver the crime the more prolonged should be the agony, could not be set aside.

One by one, according to age, beginning with the infant, the heads of the four children were struck off by the flashing blade of the swordsman executioner, whose rapidity and sure skill rendered his horrible task a work of merely a few seconds' duration. Then came the turn of the parents. But the slaughter of her children had driven the tortured mother

For his People

mad, and in uncontrollable fury she railed at the officials standing around, and denounced their barbarity with all the invective at her command.

“Murderers !” she cried, “you have beheaded my innocent boys and shed the blood of my babe ! You have not an atom of mercy in your hearts ! You have forced me to witness your studied cruelties ! Heaven shall punish you ! Not one of you shall escape ! All who have shared in these acts shall be cursed for ever and ever !”

“Well said, wife,” shouted Sogoro, who thus far had retained something of his habitual calm. “Well said. We yield our own lives freely, for it is in conformity with law—cruel as is that law—but our children had done nothing to merit death. There is no crime so great as the punishment of the guiltless, and Heaven will be avenged. The house of Hotta shall fall ! I say it with my latest breath. Neither its master nor those of its

The Execution

household shall know, henceforward, one instant's peace. My spirit shall haunt them to the end."

As Sogoro uttered these words a shudder ran through the crowd. But the executioners quickly seized the two remaining victims and strapped them to the crosses, Tsuta continuing to make her voice heard in malediction, until a lance thrust in the heart ended her sufferings for ever. Both Sogoro and Tsuta were repeatedly pierced, however, by the executioners' pikes, amid an indescribable uproar of mingled lamentation, execration, and prayer. The din was audible, in that clear unruffled atmosphere, even a mile away, so loud were the outcries of the excited multitude.

The priests, who had been awed and shuddering spectators of this terrifying sequence of events, now came forward and claimed the poor maimed and mutilated bodies for decent burial.

Kozen was no longer with them.

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. In a paroxysm of grief he had rushed to Lake Inba, and had flung himself headlong into its icy embrace.

Over the corpses of parents and children were solemnized all the soothing funeral rites of the Buddhist church, and in a spot close to the place of their execution the six victims of the tyranny of a feudal *régime* were laid to eternal rest.

Their graves are never neglected, for reverent hands, in spring, summer, and autumn, lay fresh flowers beside the tombstones, the while that humble worshippers at the temple erected in the patriots' honour, not far away, raise hand and voice in supplication to the Beneficent Supreme.

* * * * *

In one of the spacious halls of his Yedo mansion sat the lord of Sakura, attired in strict ceremonial costume. He wore the Kàmi-Shimo, a dress which betokened not less his rigid adherence to established custom than

The Execution

his sense of the constraint which he felt in the presence of the offended majesty of Heaven, by reason of his having so recently deprived six of his fellow-mortals of life. The attitude expressed, if not contrition, at least a conviction that those who might ordain capital punishment were not exempt from an awful responsibility. Hotta's countenance was indicative, even more than his demeanour, of the uneasiness that he felt concerning the nature of the punishment he had meted out to Sogoro and his family. A naturally hasty temper had led him originally to decree the executions, and an inflexible pride subsequently forbade his mitigating the harshness of the sentences. Obstinacy was one of the Lord Hotta's characteristics, and it was his obstinacy that precluded any admission that his conscience—the while that he remained in solemn solitude, awaiting the return of the official witnesses from Sakura—pricked him sorely for the deeds that had been done in his name the day before.

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The officers were presently announced, and briefly made their reports.

"Did the executions take place at the hour of the Snake?" his lordship immediately inquired.

"They did, my lord, at precisely that hour," one of the men replied.

[Time was measured in Japan, in ancient times, by periods which were either one-sixth of the day, between sunrise and sunset, or one-sixth of the night, from sunset to sunrise. These "hours," so-called, were named after the twelve signs of the Japanese Zodiac. The hour of the Snake was about 10 A.M. of modern reckoning.]

"And how did the criminals behave themselves?" asked Hotta.

"They were quite resigned to their fate, and met death bravely," was the answer.

"But were they not bitterly denunciative of the authorities, as having inflicted a penalty that was unjust and disproportionate to their

The Execution

crime ? Tell me the whole truth ; hide nothing, I command you."

" May we in all humility ask, my lord, what induces you to suppose that such things could have occurred ?" said the spokesman of the group of retainers.

" I will tell you. Yesterday, as it was the day appointed for the execution, I was sitting here alone, in ceremonial dress, as you see me now. I had been here from early morning, and just as the hour of the Snake approached, I became half unconscious, and was carried, as it were in a dream, to where I could hear the murmur of many tongues, and the sounds of bitter lamentation blended with cries of execration. Curses upon my house seemed to rise above the tumult, and mingled with the plaintive cries of the condemned. My momentary indisposition vanished, but has left with me a suspicion that some such scene occurred. I desire, therefore, that you will render a full account of what took place."

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. The witnesses, thus adjured, were compelled to relate the facts, but they were not a little terrified to discover that, as it seemed to their inflamed imaginations, the curses which Sogoro and Tsuta, in their hearing, had but a few hours previously invoked were already in operation. The agonized features of the crucified pair were vividly before the minds of the little knot of retainers, who now were witnesses of another form of excruciating torture, in the obvious mental suffering of their horror-stricken lord.

As the narrative proceeded, Hotta, by a manifest effort, recovered himself sufficiently to affect, with more or less success, a contemptuous laugh at the threats which he was told the dying Sogoro had uttered.

"At death," he made the effort to declare, "the material elements return to earth, and the spirit flees to the great void. There remains nought by which to convey either hatred or gratitude. Our imaginations alone are the

The Execution

sources of any subsequent manifestations ; the soul does not revisit this world, though to our wilder fancy it may seem to reappear. The law has been vindicated, the offenders are dead. That is all. But I must make my report to the Council of State, as in duty bound. Let my *cortège* be made ready. I will go at once to the Shogun's castle.

CHAPTER XIII

CONCLUSION

IN the Yedo mansion there was a notable absence from that time forward of all gaiety and cheerfulness. A settled gloom, reflected in the faces of all who dwelt therein, from the Lord Hotta to his humblest retainer, pervaded the atmosphere of the princely halls wherein of old the Sakura chieftains were wont to hold high revel. Banquets and carousals were things of the past, and even the hilarity of the domestics, which never had been curbed before, came to be sternly repressed as tending to give dire offence to the stern-visaged master, from whose daily existence all that was associated with mirth and festivity, of whatever kind, seemed to have been finally obliterated.

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The first indication that the unhappy Lord Hotta had perceived of impending trouble had been conveyed in an expression by the Shogun of dissatisfaction at the turn which affairs had taken in the fief, on the day when his lordship of Sakura had gone to the Castle to make his report. Hotta had at that time announced the abolition of the surcharges so strenuously objected to by the peasantry, as well as the execution of the Sogoro family for the crime of petitioning his Highness direct. The Shogun had very plainly declared it to be his opinion that justice had by no means been impartially administered in Sakura, and that the real authors of the mischief had been allowed to escape scot-free.

Hotta had that afternoon returned to his mansion in a more than ever perturbed state of mind. He realized that, apart from the superstitious dread which he found it impossible to shake off, there was a very real menace to his prolonged tenure of the fief in the

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obvious displeasure of the Shogun. Late in the day as it unquestionably was for the institution of inquiries, he was nevertheless determined that a strict examination should at least be made into the conduct of his provincial officials.

When there is reason to expect that a conspiracy is on the point of being exposed, it is usual to find that the plotters have much to say to one another in the nature of mutual recrimination. The minds of the lord of Sakura's stewards and others prominent in his service at his castle were terribly agitated at the prospect of wholesale investigation being made into their conduct of his affairs, and more than one member of his entourage began to realize that the weapon of the public executioner was possessed of a phenomenally keen edge. Consequently there were many who sought to relieve themselves of possible blame by shifting their responsibilities to the shoulders of their less astute comrades. But the Lord

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Hotta, when once resolved to administer justice, was not the sort of person to be deterred by trifles, and in his desire that every man should fare according to his deserts, he found it needful to condemn no fewer than twenty-seven officials, high and low, as having been guilty of malpractices.

The stipends of these were forfeited from that day forth, and sentences of perpetual exile were passed upon all; but a large proportion of the evil-doers did not wait to receive their punishment. They voluntarily committed "seppuku," that is to say, they fell upon their own swords, whilst their best friends stood by in readiness to decapitate them, and so end their sufferings. For those who were banished, however, there was grief to come, inasmuch as the people in the neighbouring provinces, to which they wended their way in poverty and disgrace, were indisposed to tolerate the presence of such notorious immigrants as the persecutors of Sogoro. The story of his wrongs had by

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this time been carried far and wide, so the exiles from Sakura in reality became beggars and outcasts, and sank into unhonoured graves.

The Lord Hotta did not escape the stigma that attached to so culpable a neglect of his domain as that of which he had unquestionably been guilty. Lack of discrimination in his choice of agents, and the infliction of excessively rigorous punishment for offences that were in great part the result of undue restrictions and unwarrantable interference by the officials, were among the charges brought against the Lord of Sakura by his compeers, to the end that he was dismissed from the post he held as a member of the Council of State, on the ground that his personal reputation had become tarnished by the maladministration of his fief.

In itself this was a heavy blow, but worse things were to befall him ; for his beloved wife, who hoped soon to present him with an heir,

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suddenly fell sick with a malignant fever, and to her disordered brain the deplorable circumstances, as related to her, attendant upon the execution of Sogoro and his family, assumed tangible and most terrifying shapes.

Her delirium caused her to imagine herself surrounded by ghosts, and she writhed and screamed in agony as the phantom forms of the crucified parents and their beloved offspring gathered around her bed.

And not only was it that the stricken lady of the house was haunted perpetually by these frightful apparitions, but the youthful maids of honour were one and all unnerved by manifestations for which they were wholly unable to account. Voices were heard in untenanted chambers, sounds of indescribable tumult occurred overhead, and there were mysterious rustlings and long-drawn sighs in the dim and dismal corridors of the rambling old building that formed the Lord Hotta's Yedo abode. Stories were soon afloat that the mansion was

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haunted by the ghosts of Sogoro and his family, and of the priest Kozen.

The well-born damsels who were ladies-in-waiting to the half-demented mistress of the establishment, being the daughters of gentlemen-retainers, could not quit the service of their lady as ordinary domestics would probably have done at the outset of these fearsome visitations, but the alarm that was created in their minds thereby was not lessened on that account, nor was it confined to any one class of the inmates, and no matter when or where the girls met, the topic of conversation was ever the same, and their personal experiences were in general of the most bewildering character.

"Miss Momiji," said one, in a half-frightened whisper, "is it true that Ayamé saw the spectre in her room last night?"

"Yes, Miss Umé," returned the person addressed; "I inquired of her this morning about it, and she described what she saw as

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a figure besmeared with blood, standing motionless in a corner of the apartment."

"But she may have been dreaming?" suggested a listener.

"Possibly so. She admits that she was a little dazed, and she was so upset by the apparition that she is quite feverish this morning."

"Do you remember the roaring that we heard from the roof the night before last?" asked Momiji.

"Yes, indeed we do," cried several girls at once. "What caused it, do you know?"

Momiji answered, in an awestricken voice, "No; they have never been able to discover the origin of it."

"It must have been the spirits," declared Umé.

"Several of us were in the room adjoining the sick-chamber last evening," continued another of the young ladies, "and suddenly we heard screams from the corridor, as though some one

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were being murdered there. We ran out to ascertain the cause, and found Miss Také on the verge of fainting with terror. She vowed she had seen a figure beckoning to her, in the dusk ; but what we perceived, by the light of our lanterns, was a white cotton cover that had been placed over one of the huge vases there, and it must have been this that scared Miss Také. Unfortunately, Také's scream so disturbed her ladyship that she was worse last night than usual."

"Yes ; is it not sad to think that a lady who is so generous and kind should suffer as she does through the wickedness of others ? To speak frankly," Momiji continued, in a low tone, "I am much afraid that she will not recover from this malady."

"I hope she will be restored to health, but it looks as though the ghosts were resolved that she should die," murmured Umé.

"But, Momiji," cried one of the youngest among them, "how is it that although the

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chief steward, Mr. Sugiyama, and all his family, were sent from Sakura into exile, Miss Hatsusé, his daughter, is permitted to retain her post here in Yedo ? ”

“ I think,” said Momiji, “ it is partly because she has insinuated herself into the good graces of her ladyship, and partly owing to the liking my lord has for her. He thinks she is an altogether different character to her father. Then again, as her ladyship is unable to bear her own part in affairs, owing to her grave illness, there is no one but Miss Hatsusé who is capable of taking charge of household matters.”

“ That may be so,” retorted her companion ; “ but you know that it was through Mr. Sugiyama’s persistency that Sogoro and his family were executed, and it seems to me that Sugiyama’s daughter being still in this mansion is one reason why the ghosts haunt it so perpetually. I wish with all my heart that I were out of it and safe in my father’s home.”

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"We all wish we were anywhere but here,"
echoed the girls.

* * * * *

Many days had elapsed since the Lord Hotta's displeasure had been visited upon the Kodzu head-man and his family, and as his anger cooled, and his social status began to be more and more affected by the obvious dissatisfaction of the Shogun, the lord of Sakura became a prey to the most poignant remorse.

Despite all his philosophy, he could not shut out from his mental vision the horrible spectacle presented by the crucifixion of Sogoro and Tsuta, and as the whisperings of the domestics and the palpable discomfort of every one connected with the mansion increased, even the most commonplace incidents of the daily life in his mansion came to exercise a baneful influence upon his lordship's mind. He could no longer resist the hallucinations which oppressed him night and day, for the moment that he closed his eyelids the scenes

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that so tormented him were re-enacted in all their hideous barbarity. At times it would be Sogoro alone who stood before him, at others Tsuta, and again at other times the priest Kozen, and though he had not seen one of them in reality, as far as he knew, their ghosts would all assemble in threatening guise at his bedside to mock him in his anguish. Gradually, but surely, body and mind gave way together under the awful strain, and the once stern and haughty lord of Sakura became almost unrecognizable, so complete was the wreck of his physical and mental attributes.

One evening, when he was sitting alone in the deepest depression, a hurried patter of sandalled feet was heard in the corridor, and several of the maids of honour made their appearance to apprise him, as they did almost breathlessly, that their lady's illness had taken a serious turn, and that they all feared her end was not far off.

Hastening towards the sick-chamber, he

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was shocked to hear the terrified tones of his wife beseeching, at one moment, that the torturing shapes which she saw around her would leave her in peace ; at the next, imploring their pardon for imaginary offences, but all the while writhing in agony under the bodily pain that she seemed to be enduring at their invisible hands.

Her anguished lord, now quite beside himself, saw in the face of the lady who knelt at the bedside, as she momentarily turned towards him when he entered, the features of the crucified Tsuta.

Losing all self-control, he drew the sword that he wore in his sash, and, rushing upon the kneeling woman, cut her in two at a stroke.

By the couch stood a physician, whose head, in accordance with the custom of the medical profession in that age, was as clean shaven as that of a Buddhist priest. In his delirium the Lord Hotta fancied that the good doctor was

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no other than Kozen, and administered so furious a slash with the weapon he wielded that the physician was likewise instantly a corpse.

When, the next moment, Hotta turned to gaze upon his wife, he saw that her contortions had ended, and that she was lying still.

Her cries had ceased—and with them, her life.

Then it was seen that the lady who had been kneeling at the bedside was Hatsusé, the daughter of the former chief steward.

Amid the commotion consequent upon these dreadful discoveries a loud and prolonged roaring emanated, as it seemed, from among the rafters overhead, and shouts of demoniac laughter echoed through the heavily timbered roof of the mansion.

Lady Hotta's funeral took place the next day, and Hatsusé was buried at the same time.

The doctor's relatives had to be compensated

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in a way that allowed of the manner of his death being kept a secret, and no inquiry followed, but the ghostly visitations to the mansion grew more persistent than ever, and the owner's fears were so overwhelming that he drew up a memorial for presentation to the Shogun.

The purport of this document was that from the day that his Highness had succeeded to his august office his advisers had been men who were far from being fit persons to discharge the onerous duties devolving upon them. Owing to maladministration of all kinds the retainers and vassals of the Shogun were enduring the direst privations, and the whole population of the empire had sunk to a deplorable state of poverty and distress. To rescue them from their peril could only be deemed a task of the first importance and greatest urgency, and hoping that the revenues of the fief of Sakura might be of aid in the restoration of

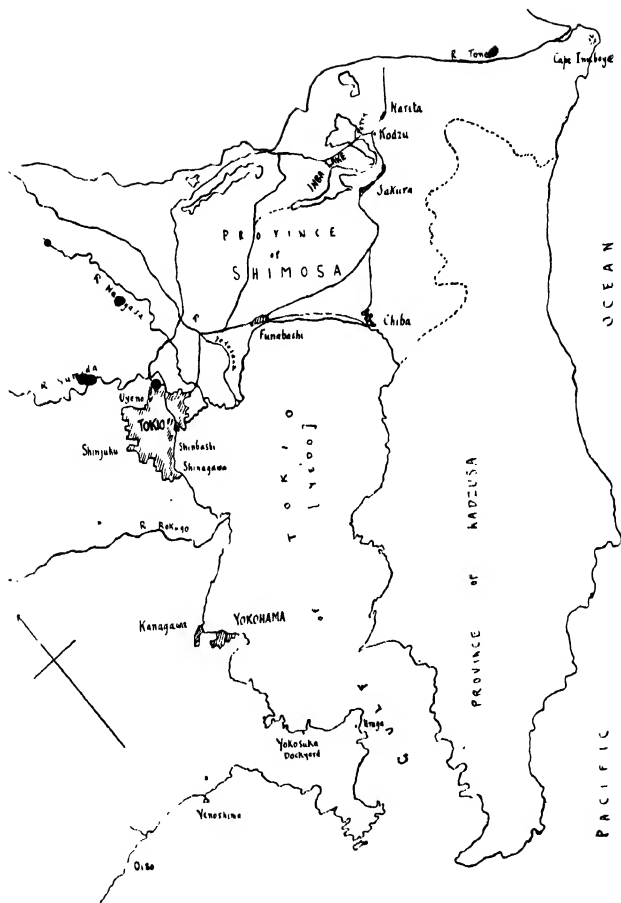
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tranquillity, the Lord Hotta humbly begged permission to deliver his estate into the Shogun's hands.

Having handed in this memorial at the Castle of Yedo, Hotta saddled his horse, secretly quitted his mansion, and galloped back the whole way to Sakura alone.

By the feudal laws of the period, if a provincial chieftain withdrew to his own domain without first seeking permission from the Shogun to absent himself from Yedo, the act was held to be preliminary to one of organised rebellion against the central authority. But the wording of Lord Hotta's memorial, and his actions in general, convinced the Shogun that madness was at the root of his behaviour. He was therefore pronounced to be insane, and the fief of Sakura was sequestrated.

• THE END



Map indicating the relative position of Sakura and its vicinity to the capital, Tokyo, and to the port of Yokohama. [End of text.]

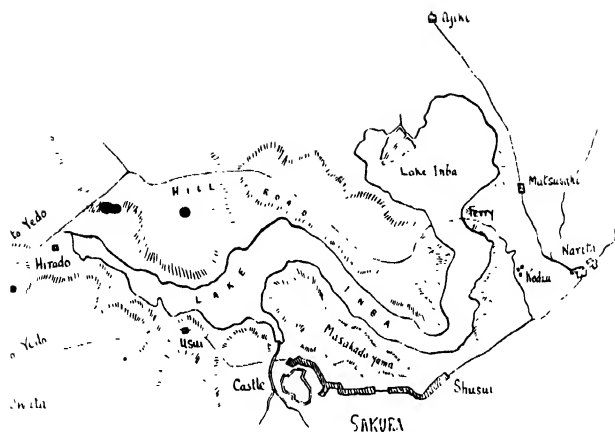


Chart of Lake Inba and neighbourhood, showing Kodzu, where Sogoro dwelt, the Hirakawa Ferry, and Masakado-yama, &c.
[End of text.]

NOTE

NOTE

MASATOSHI, the younger brother of Masanobu, was lord of the domain of Yamagata, in Dewa province, at the time that the tragic occurrences narrated in the preceding chapters actually took place. Seventy years later, by decree of the Shogun of that period, the sequestered fief of Sakura was restored to the family of Hotta by special grant to this Yamagata branch of the house. It was in this way that it came about that a noble of the Hotta line figured so conspicuously in the negotiations with the representative of the United States of America, Mr. Townsend Harris, that ensued upon Commodore Perry's visit to the bay of Yedo in 1853. The first treaty between Japan and the United States, which was the product of the negotiations alluded to, was arranged between Mr. Harris and Hotta, then lord of Bitchiu, who was a direct descendant of that Hotta Masatoshi in whose line the Sakura fief had been revived. This treaty of 1854 (for that was the year in which it was actually concluded) was undoubtedly entered into by the

Note

Shogun's Government in the face of fierce opposition from the feudal lords of almost all the other provinces, and the fact that Hotta, as Chief Counsellor, wielded so much influence as to procure the signature of the document is very notable when we consider the immense strides that have been made since that first, important step was taken.

Though Hotta Masanobu's tenure of the fief was terminated under the circumstances set forth in these pages, the glories of the family traditions were, by no means extinguished. The treaty with the United States made in 1857 was practically, though not, of course, in strict detail, the model upon which subsequent agreements with foreign nations were, in pre-Restoration days—whilst the Shoguns were still in power—almost exclusively adjusted. The Lord Hotta of that comparatively recent date—viz. 1857, when the treaty with America was signed—was principal Counsellor of State, and was the accredited agent, in these negotiations, of the Shogun, erroneously styled, in the official translations of the period, "the Tycoon." Moreover that Lord Hotta was the father of Count Hotta, now a peer of the realm.

There is, then, for the people of Tokio (formerly Yedo), and those who dwell in the adjacent region, which anciently bore the title of Shimosa, a living interest still attaching to the story of Sogor's heroic

Note

career, and the memory of the brilliant example that he set to succeeding generations will never, it is certain, be wholly effaced.

Sogoro's famous exploit, when he succeeded in handing his petition personally to the Shogun, took place at a spot which now forms part of the Public Park (Uyeno) in the Japanese capital.

